BLACK CAT

CLEVER SHORT STORIES

The Black Cat

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The Lowe Observatory
Edgar Lucien Larkin, Director
Los Angeles, Calif., Dec. 6, 1916.
Mr. C. F. Haanel, St. Louis, Mo.
Dear Sir:
Your booklet, "Master-Key," ought to be expanded into a book. Its teachings that Mind is the all-dominating creative force is precisely in line with the wonders of the most recent psychology. All persons having desks should have this pamphlet thereon. And it would be a fitting pocket companion.
EDGAR LUCIEN LARKIN,
Author of the Matchless Altar of the Soul

First Nautilus Center
160 Claremont Ave., New York
New York, Nov. 18, 1916.
I have made a thorough examination of the little booklet which you so appreciatively have called the "Master-Key," and can unhesitatingly endorse it and its teachings.
In this pamphlet of only a few pages you have led a hungry world to the threshold and placed in their hands a "key" with which the understanding ones may unlock the door and enter "The Secret Places of the Most High," and enjoy the abundance of all good to be found therein. With best wishes,
AGNES MAE GLASGOW, M. D.

THE MASTER MIND
Annie Rix Militz, Editor
Los Angeles, Calif.
The "Master-Key" is an excellent booklet of strong, scientific reaching of the allness of mind, not lacking in Spirituality, yet especially appealing to the intellect desiring logical proof of Truth.

Home Life Insurance Company of New York,
James Lee Bost, General Agent
Washington, D. C., Dec. 29, 1916.
Mr. CHAS. F. HAANEL,
St. Louis, Mo.
Dear Sir:
Your little booklet, entitled "The Master-Key," has been received and I had great pleasure in studying it carefully. It is very clear and concise, yet forceful presentation of the big subject handled, and shows a very wide study of the absolute teachings and deep understanding of the same. Very truly yours,
JAMES LEE BOST.

The Weltmer Institute of Suggestive Therapeutics
Nevada, Mo., Dec. 17, 1916.
CHAS. F. HAANEL, St. Louis, Mo.
Dear Sir:
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Your most sincere friend,
SIDNEY A. WELTMER, Pres.

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The International New Thought Alliance, General Headquarters
Washington, D. C., Nov. 14, 1916.
CHAS. F. HAANEL,, St. Louis, Mo.
My Dear Mr. Haanel:
I have read your little booklet, "The Master-Key," carefully, and think it very good indeed. I am enclosing stamps for a few more copies, which I wish to give to those whom I know to need just the dynamic message which your book contains. Yours sincerely,
GRACE WILSON, Sec.

Unity School of Christianity
Kansas City, Mo., Dec. 14, 1916.
Dear Mr. Haanel:
Your little book, entitled "Master-Key," is a very practical presentation of the power of mind in its various fields of action. It conveys to one the conviction that Mind is All Powerful and All Present.
Faithfully,
CHARLES FILLMORE, Pres.

The Day Star Publishing Co.
Topeka, Kansas, Feb. 15, 1917.
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LIDA HALLIE HARDY, Pres.

Washington, D. C., Nov. 21, 1916.
I have just received and read your booklet called "The Master-Key." It is exceedingly thoughtful and in many ways masterful. I thank you for the privilege of reading it and will file it away with my strong presentations of the philosophy of life. I am truly yours,
GRANVILLE LOWTHER.

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429 Granite Bldg., St. Louis, Mo.
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CHILDREN OF TWILIGHT

By CHARLIE ALEXANDER

This story goes back to the primitive. Youth battles for existence and for a reward which, judging by the last line, is well worth having.

SOMETHING snapped aloud and brushed his flesh. He dragged himself to life and activity in time to avoid the peril, a huge turtle-like amphibian, which pursued him with awkward caudal scramble.

He fled, but the shingle was dotted with similar hard-shelled creatures. More emerged momentarily from the surf. So, with boyish daring, he leaped upon the back of the first monster and bludgeoned its head roundly with a club.

But the head, a bony, skinless box with hooked, toothless beak and lidless eyes that responded dully to the light, was little concerned at the showering blows. The amphibian snapped his mandibles and turned jerkily round and round, but he could not reach the man.

At the commotion the other turtles betook themselves one by one back into the ocean. Many times the turtle upon which the boy perched started for the breakers; but always he so belabored its head, which it did not possess the power to sheathe, that it turned aside.

Then, being alone with it upon the beach, he would leap off and circle about it exultantly, only to hop back and flail mercilessly its head and horn-skinned neck when it sought to enter the sea.

Of a sudden the animal set off downshore intently. One end of a driffed tree trunk rested upon a man-high boulder. Between this and the earth the three-vertebraed monster headed, seeking to lose its captor. But the young man heaved the log on over the crest of the rock, and as the turtle crossed its path, let it fall.

Pinned down by the weight upon its neck, alternately threshing its flippers and snapping its beak, it sought to live. Tongueless, it could only vent harsh hisses from its throat.

So the great boy left his first adventure upon the strange shore.

He roamed the strand some time, half-hoping for sign of his kin. How he had come to awaken upon the turtle-sands he knew not. He remembered the cataclysm of yesterday—or had it been a sun or two before? An eval age had passed since the black waters and oblivion had reached their greedy hands to his father's village.

He traveled inland through lush, rank jungle swamp and bosky swale. It was not where rolls the Oregon then. It was the Two Islands; and over the broad valley lashed a storming main.

The first night he spent in the corolla of an oozy, fungus growth. But thereafter, becoming familiar and contemptuous, he slept upon the beach of an inland bayou.

Many prowlers approached, but the young man was to his feet in a bound and swinging his club mightily. His activity won a niche in the milling hordes about him, and they passed by suspiciously, fearful because they knew not what his power was.

His turtle was torn to shreds when next day he visited the spot. But the beach was again populated with amphibians; and, resetting his deadfall and seeking diversion, he repeated the trapping of the largest he could find. Several times it threw him off its back, but he escaped the lightning snap-beak and finally dropped the heavy log upon its neck.

Each day when life palled upon him, he caught a turtle, carrying back to his bayou the bony head of its predecessor. When

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the ocean shingle had been cleared of the monsters, he gorged upon the large, round eggs they had deposited. And each day that he left a turtle, before the morn it was torn to shreds and its three-ridged back and bony head left lolling on the sand.

Once, before the gold-beamed dawn, he surprised the thieving carnivore who had come to expect a daily appeasement from the man. It was a lithe, tawny tiger, carefully groomed and sleek; and its protruding sabers gleamed like the tusks of a walrus as it favored him with a snarl. But it, too, slunk away presently, for it had seen that the beaten track of the jungle veered from the lair of this agile upright being. Precedent was not lightly to be set aside, even by jungle kings.

The man strengthened, and spread his dominion. He sped about beach and morass, attacking all comers impartially. He even roared defiance at the lumbering saurians, before dodging out of their piggish vision.

Often the night kept him much afoot, when newcomers crossed the deadline and blundered upon his precincts. By day he ate and slept and amused himself.

The semi-civilization of his boyhood dropped from him. The firebeds of his father's village, the warm huts and rude household materials, he forgot. The industries, the labors of men, he unlearned. There was no need of them in this sun-blessed land. Life, luscious and plentiful all about, spared him bountifully of its substance.

He was an atavist, and he reverted quickly, forgetting the progress that had cost his kind many painful, laborious ages. The waters had thrown him upon the shore, beaten and bruised. And he, beating and bruising and taking for himself, was inexpressibly happy. He was a rollicking, carefree boy, with the glint of health upon his features and an exuberance of life bubbling unquenchably within.

FOR THREE dawnings he had seen the skulking cat stealing his turtle, feeding and fatting of his kills, and loathe to depart even at his appearance.

This morning the cat growled openly and the man himself, with sudden fear, was prudent and did not approach. He turned the other way upon the beach, into new territory.

Some picked bones and a beaten copper knife, fastened to its thong, he found. They were all the trace he had of the land of his father. The bones he disregarded; for so completely had the vestige of civilization slipped away, that he had lost even the superstitious awe so carefully taught him. But the green-bitten knife he draped from his shoulder, for he realized its latent potency.

Next morn he left his bayou early. Scarcely had he stretched his limbs when he came upon tracks that meandered, with many a pause and quirk, inquiringly about his bed. It was evident the owner had scrutinized him carefully from many vantage-places.

Smaller than his feet they were, and plainly human.

He wondered that he still lived, but felt no softening mercy toward the visitor for the sin of omission. He gripped his dull dagger and followed, down the bayou to the beach, and so along the froth-path to the turtle trap.

At every turn he prepared for battle. Yet the track sped on and gave no pause, as though purposely it was designed to lure him to its destination.

Out of familiar territory he passed, into the curve of another bayou. And as he trailed, wary and watchful ever, he grew suspicious of his own back trail.

At length, falling into a beaten path, the trail led straight to the foot of an upreared bluff.

Up the height of three men was a small opening that might be entered stoopingly. Upon the ground lay the half shell of a large cane tree, as it had been pushed away by the last entree.

The man saw plainly how it was done. Leaving, the denizen hung from the slight outjut in front of his threshold and dropped to the soft mound beneath. The soil showed that, entering, he uprighted the light, fibrous cane trunk and ascended by means of the notches on its convex sur-

face. Then he pushed it aside and it fell to the ground.

The carnivora could not reach the cave. The colossal saurians could no more than sniff at the entrance as they lumbered by, for the living rock denied entrance. Only man, reasoning out the combination, could enter when the cane ladder lay upon the earth.

The great boy tried to penetrate the blackness beyond the cave door, but could not. He wondered what eyes were watching him from there. Recalling the bows and arrows that flew as the wind, possessed by his father's tribe long ago, he withdrew a distance.

The back trail worried him. He had caught no turtle the day before, because the turtle herd was depleted and grown wise. So now he cautiously approached the bluff and softly upended the cane ladder, placing its top carefully in place. Then again he watched.

His premonition was justified. Shortly, out of the primeval swamp, the huge saber-tooth took form. For all its weight the cat bounded lightly. Snoop was written from tip to tip of it. Its nose was not to the trail, for it followed by sight.

The tiger considered the trampled earth, and studied the worn ladder. Then it carefully tried its weight upon the trunk and, crouching, crept upward.

Upon the young man's face a soundless laugh spread. The intruder who had feared to attack him even as he slept, would be killed. He would not have to scratch and claw with such a weakling. He wondered if he would have to kill the cat, when it had tired itself and gorged, or if it would lie down in the man's den, and if he could stop the entrance successfully while it slept. If so, he would ride a turtle every step of the way and weight it down outside, where the tiger could see.

But scarcely had the thoughts occurred, and scarcely had the cat mounted halfway, when an apparition popped from the black tunnel and stood upon the ledge.

The golden sun blazed in her hair. The white milky silver of the ice-moon was her skin. From a shoulder, protecting breasts and body, hung a stole of the small, soft pelts which the man had ever disdained to kill.

Shrieking, he sprang forward. He seized the ladder butt and jerked it from the ground. But the cat, with a final bound, clawed itself upon the outcrop just as the figure disappeared within.

In an instant, before he could replace the ladder, a body fell into his arms. And even in the second as he eased her to the ground, he had time to wonder at the warmth and softness, and whiteness and firm feel of her. Then he was mounting to the tunnel; but the tiger sprang upon him ere he touched the ledge, and both hurtled downward.

Although the feline landed upon its four feet, the man was even quicker. He was squarely in its face, as the huge cat raised it, shoulder-high to him, and spat and slapped in cat fashion. He plunged his knife in and out before the blow descended, and he danced about in front of the beast's face, so that its paw fell sidewise to him. In like fashion, as it struck with its other paw, he knifed it deep and dodged.

He could not draw away, or circle, or allow the feline a chance to uncoil its frame and spring. He pressed always close to the spitting, yawning jaws, and knifed it repeatedly as it drew up and struck at him.

Its chest became a mass of ripped hide and flesh. The earth became greasy with gore. Still he slashed on, reaching for the heart. And ever the feline drew back and sought to spring upon him, and ever he pressed close to its face instantly, forcing it to fend at him vainly.

His immense danger in hugging it continually was the gaping, saber-armed mouth. The cat laid its head back for the most part and, looking into the green iris and yellow notch of them, he saw in the orbs a deepness and cunning that, likewise, was playing a game. Occasionally, when the eyes signalled, the cat varied its thrusts with a sudden snap and swish of jaws; and more than once the man felt bristly lips brush him as he dodged. Only the signal he saw in its eyes saved him. He realized that at any moment the

jaws might snap successfully. So he measured eyes, and after every snap or slap, rushed in to the heart.

The fight became automatic. The cat, backed close to the bluff, reared on one front leg and struck a long sweep with the other. Whereupon he dashed away the blood that blurred his vision and knifed the propping paw until it flexed in pain and fetched dizzily at him. He sought the heart, and would not let the feline again rise above him.

At length the cat ceased snapping. Nothing about it moved but the dab-dab of its paws, striking with unsheathed claws that more and more often glazed his flesh redly. The gaping mouth was open in a continuous spit of pent fury; the black lips drew about white fangs in a set snarl, and the ears lay flat upon the round head. But in the owlish eyes cunning and patience obtained; they no longer flamed with anger, but watched his every movement.

The man in turn saw the change and hacked away methodically. His strength ebbed as the blood that flowed in front of him. A piece of butchered flesh lay underfoot. He dashed in and out terrifically, speedily, for only by such maintained speed might he keep the cat down before him. Ever he delved for the vital spot that lay too deep for his short dirk.

Then he slipped upon the gristle underfoot. Instantly the feline pounced; but something caught the man's foot and yanked him out of danger. Awakened, he rushed in again determinedly. He could not quit. To pause was to invite the swift pounce that would clutch him beneath the forepaws, wherewith the tiger held its prey while dining. He dared not take a moment's pause, lest the cat sidestep and crush him with a blow delivered home. He kept it there, squatted face to his face, only by his continuous belaboring under its very nose, which busied the cat with fending him from its own heart.

The cat now sprang a new play. It laid its head close to earth, ceased striking, and wherever he turned, presented frothy jaws and glistening teeth to him.

But it could not snap at him so dangerously, either; and he soon forced it, by well-pointed thrusts, back to the squatting posture.

He sprang in again and again, and each time with all his strength he drove home the puny metal. But, save for the great eyes which followed him, and the tail which beat the ground unceasingly, the cat did not heed.

Hot tears of helplessness washed the blood from his eyes. He sobbed for very impotence that he could not make it die.

Then, at one side, he saw the girl. In her hands she held a knife—a copper knife, as long as her arm, and as wide of blade. Its point tapered as the smallest dainty digit of her hand.

She was behind him, and the knife was in his hand. The round eyes, level with his own, flecked with interest. Now the feline half closed its mouth and bared its rending sabers even more threateningly. Its muscles gathered. It drew its head back into the pouncing position. The quietness of the pose, and the pent tenseness of it, baffled him. He shrieked at the beast, and brandished his new weapon tentatively in its face. But it bided on.

He saw the girl approach the cat, and he gibbered to her over the bristled back. Yet never for a second did he lose sight of the yellow eyes.

Then, suddenly, their patient cunning fled. The pupils dilated. The skin of the beast's neck crawled in stiff waves. The head went up and back in a quaking roar.

The man did not question. He struck. He drove the long knife with all his choking virulence through flesh and fibre till a stream spouted out over it, over his arm and over his head, a strong hot stream that strangled him so that he wilted, even as the huge, slithering cat-head drooped suddenly forward.

He knew that he was sick, and very tired, and that he could not stand for trembling. He wanted to stay where he had fallen, to rest, or to sleep, or to die, whichever oblivion came upon him. His limp muscles cried out with the cry of dissolution as he swung his weight upon them.

Yet he clenched his jaw and crawled

upward as she dragged at him, swaying, slow and swaying, until he lay safely in the cave and the ladder lay upon the mound below, and the first fire-smoke he had sniffed since the black water delightfully smarted his nostrils.

He awoke, and without stirring examined the cave. It was fitted with many newmade household utensils. He recognized the handiwork of the goods and gods of his father's village.

He considered the warmth and dryness, and the enclosing protection of the five rock walls. He watched the girl at the fire, and marveled at her adeptness. Always, he felt, he had lived in a cave; and always a moonbeam-girl had flitted yon and hither in it. He had been off on a far dream-journey, lost from his kind; and now, as the girl in the soft black stole vignetted from the foreground of his mind, he was being taken away again. Blackness tossed him along—the blackness of mad waters; and the roar of them was upon him, as when they had laid hold of his father's village.

He strained to pierce the black vista where he had lost her whiteness, but in its farthest reach flickered only a grinning miniature tiger-face. With quick, adumbrant passage it confronted him and filled his vision; the eyes signalled, and then the jaws closed upon his head relentlessly, so that he flailed his arms about and tore at the beast's soft face, scattering the small pelts of his couch about the cave.

But although the mouth closed upon him, the teeth left no hurt upon his skull, merely bearing down with overwhelming power while the beast of prey played with him. Thinking to escape he tried and cautiously turned his head upwards until, with opened eyes, he saw the moonbeam-girl leaning over him. And he knew that the papillary tiger-tongue was the soft fur thrown across the girl's lap, upon which his head lay, and that it was his own fatigue that crushed him down.

In the distance, as he listened, receded the deluge's tumult. Above him the girl crooned softly, as a mother.

"You came?" he asked.

"I came with the waters," she answered. "I was in the growing-up girls' hut. In a week I would have become a woman."

He touched her hair wonderingly, where it fell beside him, and lifted her arm, light-creamed by the elements.

After a time, without stirring, he spoke up to her. "What did you do, what did you do to the great tiger?"

"Oh, I"—crumpling some jet pellage with her free hand, berry mouth wrying witchily—"I twisted his tail," she answered.

THAT ROGUE, FLEURELLE

By CARROLL K. MICHENER

Fleurelle in his cups is a humorist as well as a gay deceiver, but when the inspiration of the evening fades before the cold reason of the morning Fleurelle finds himself in a predicament.

"SAY to his excellency," Fleurelle commanded through his interpreter, "that I will have nothing less than the fairest woman of his household."

The interpreter, a sophisticated Chinese from the coast, smiled at this, thinking it a jest. Fleurelle rewarded his amiability with a loud curse. He was none the better-tempered for the mandarin's wine, it seemed, though he had consumed quantity enough. The interpreter used words to dissuade Fleurelle. He explained that in China a woman of the household is not a proper gift to a guest. Trinkets of gold he might command, but not a gift that would injure his host's honor. Moderation would be wise, too, advised the interpreter, because of the unusual compliment implied in allowing the guest to name his own memento of farewell.

"I will have a woman—the handsomest of them all!" shouted the rogue of a Frenchman, lying back on the mandarin's lacquered *kang* and puffing furiously at his long pipe. "I have read the tales of the Arabian Nights, and I understand that these things can be done."

The interpreter bowed, and spoke many words in Chinese to the mandarin's secretary. When the secretary understood what was the "foreign-devil's" desire, he rubbed his hands and kow-towed with agitation, wondering, as he shuffled away, what punishment would be his for bearing such a message to his master. Doubtless he would have to suffer the punishment the white man merited, for though Fleurelle had flouted the rigid category of Chinese etiquette and conveyed a personal affront to the mandarin, these were days when a white man must be excused anything. The memory of the conquest of the imperial capital by the foreign troops was recent enough to be a potent reminder of the white man's power.

Fleurelle, steeped in his host's wine, remained on the *kang*, puffing smoke, and chuckling at the whim that had bounded into his fancy from those old days when he had read of the vizier's daughter and the the bride-slaying Arabian king. This whole day's adventure, he reflected, had been like a page out of those oriental romancings, translated from Near East to Far East. So had most of the days beginning with the Boxer cataclysm, and leading through the blood and din of the siege of the Peking legations, and the consequent chaos. The most absurd things had happened, as unbelievable as any in the tales of Shahrazad; and more absurd things were happening now, in the complete confusion of the paralyzed old nation.

Not the least absurd was this present adventure of Fleurelle. From the uproar and danger of the long siege, shut up amid death and the imminence of death in the narrow quarter of Peking where for months the Boxer fanatics, unrestrained by the doddering old witch of an Empress dowager, had done their futile best to exterminate the foreigners from imperial soil, Fleurelle had emerged in need of some diversion. He had done his part of the looting. His gains he had lost riotously in gambling with the French soldiers, and in certain roistering escapades, of which the less said the better. Officially his duties were negligible. There could be no great use in the midst of such chaos for a commercial agent of the French legation. So, with ennui and law-

lessness of mind heavy upon him he had gone forth buccaneering. It had been easy to supply himself with diplomatic papers that would take him about wherever French influence followed the French uniform, and in this instance he had been able to supply himself with a military bodyguard.

Fleurelle shook himself with chuckling as he surveyed the state apartment in which he found himself, and reflected upon the strategy that had brought him there. The credit for it belonged largely to one of the soldiers in his guard.

"You are a great Western mandarin," suggested this soldier to Fleurelle, with a wink. "No—better still: you are a great scholar. The mandarins in the walled cities shall do you so much the greater honor."

Now Fleurelle had not started out on a triumphal official tour, and he cared nothing for mandarins. He was bound for the imperial tombs near Y-Chow, partly from curiosity, partly for adventure, partly because until these chaotic times no eye of a "foreign devil" ever had profaned those sacred sepulchers of Tartar royalty; but—if the whole truth be told—it must be confessed that Fleurelle had some more or less vague notion of prying off a bit of gold tiling from the temple roofs, filing away a golden bell or two from the gables, or confiscating some sacred relic or other that might be of value among the curio-mad folk of the treaty ports. Nevertheless the soldier's suggestion interested him, with the result that retainers of the Cho-Chow mandarin, encountering the Fleurelle expedition, flew to the walled city with due tidings of the approach of the "great Western mandarin of letters."

Half a mile from the city gates Fleurelle brought his party to a halt, and waited for the mandarin to bestow the customary honors. He was choked with the dust of the day's ride, dust that whirled from the dry fields and mingled with the powdery yellow filtering over the vast plain from distant, wind-scoured reaches of Mongol desert. In this condition he reflected that the hospitality even of a Chinese mandarin of doubtful affluence would not be unwelcome.

Fleurelle was rewarded presently by the sight of a commotion at the great gate of the walled city. A concourse of people issued forth, amid a blare of trumpets and the banging of gongs. The group elongated itself toward him, raising an ashy cloud of dust that shaped itself aloft like a huge panoply. To Fleurelle the spectacle seemed as unreal as one of the pictures of smoke-clouded djinns in the Arabian legends. The jaundiced sunlight, filtering through opaque atmosphere, added to this unreality of the scene. In the background an ash-colored wall lifted crenellated ramparts thirty or forty feet from the dreary vastness of the plain.

At a hundred paces from where Fleurelle stood the procession halted, and ranged itself in ranks along either side of the gullied roadway. From a silk-covered palanquin there approached a retainer, who stopped fifty paces away and held up to view, with dolorous intonements, a huge sheet of red paper bearing black ideographs —the mandarin's calling card.

Fleurelle knew something of Chinese etiquette, and was punctilious to the uttermost. When the proper greetings had been exchanged with the great man of the city, sitting in his silken palanquin, the procession got under way again, and the "great Western mandarin" was conducted with due pomp toward the city gate. In the lead bobbed a pair of red parasols, with silk streamers. After them, carried at the end of a long stick, floated a fantastic paper butterfly; then a line of banners, each with its carrier, and wooden tablets of red lacquer, emblazoned with gilt lettering.

Lugubriously, funereally, clanged the gongs as the procession moved, and the heralds wailed to the empty fields the fame of the great man who now made glorious approach to the city. Peering from the wall, and pouring through the gate as the procession neared, were several hundred of the city's curious, staring silently at the white man who rode so solemnly at the head of his six mounted soldiers.

The horror of the Boxer rebellion was too recent to prevent the sub-conscious apprehension with which Fleurelle viewed

the expressionless features of the crowd. Doubtless there were among those who now elbowed him in the cavernous gateway men who had been at their work of slaying and pillaging only a little time since. Who could tell what murder and what treachery still might be lurking behind the impassivity of these oriental faces?

Fleurelle's apprehension was not quieted by a sight that met his eyes in the gateway. From a beam above his head hung half a dozen curious wooden cages, suspended by rope-like handles that discovered themselves on closer scrutiny to be plaited human hair. Through the bars of the cages—amid the swarm of flies hovering about them—leered the blackened features of the owners of these suspended queues, their heads long severed from bodies that had been dragged to the mandarin's justice for some crime or other against the peace and dignity of his realm.

Into the jostling crowd packing the narrow streets, the procession moved, engulfed in yellow nudity that was relieved only a little by tattered blue cotton. Rows of granite images—sculptured bodies of lions with heads of dogs—indicated the path of state leading to the mandarin's palace. It was twilight when the procession filed into the *yamen* courtyard. Horn lanterns were alight, and rows of servants were lined, sober, impassive, where Fleurelle rode in the wake of the silken palanquin.

The ceremony of lodging him was attended with due punctiliousness. He found himself at length in this dusty, decrepit mansion, in the midst of a wide courtyard ornamented with deformed old trees. His chamber was huge and gloomy. From the *kang* on which he reclined he looked up among lofty rafters, smoked black from the torches of perhaps two or three centuries. The *kang* was of ponderous ebony, carved deeply with the fantastic figures of dragons. There were yellowed silk scrolls on the walls, bearing bits of verse from the Chinese classics. A hard, silk-covered bed stood in one corner of the room, and near it a bronze incense burner. The window panes were of paper. Old-fashioned everything was—even for China!

After the ceremony of drinking tea with his host, and exchanging the ponderous words of politeness demanded by Chinese etiquette, there was feasting on a multitude of foods, and drinking of many a measure of hot rice wine poured from silver pitchers into small silver cups. And at the end of it Fleurelle found himself alone at last, indulging his imagination in fancies derived from tales of the Arabian Nights. The mandarin's secretary interrupted his musings, inquiring his desires concerning the gift of farewell, and when Fleurelle had sufficiently amused himself with the notion of demanding the fairest woman in the mandarin's household he tumbled off to bed, listening to the ghostly prying of the wind among the loose timbers of the old building, the scurrying of rats under the beaten floor, and the loud clacking of the night watchmen's wooden gongs as they trod through the courtyard.

Doubtless the wine had much to do with Fleurelle's fantastic stipulation regarding the mandarin's gift of farewell, for he recalled nothing of it in the morning. The sun, streaming yellowishly through the paper windowpanes, aroused him with stiffened muscles from his hard bed. The interpreter ushered in servants bearing his morning food, and announced that his guard of soldiers, well wassailed as befitted their station, awaited him at the *yamen* gate. The mandarin's retinue waited, too, prepared to escort the "great Western mandarin of letters" on his way.

There may have been a sinister cloud over the hospitable veneer of the mandarin's countenance as he bade his guest goodbye, but Fleurelle did not observe it. He sauntered forth, and rode away pompously between the rows of crowding, yellow faces, and the roguish leering of dog-headed stone lions.

It was only when the gray walls were distant behind him, dimmed by the yellow screen of dust raised by his cavalcade, that Fleurelle was reminded of his demand of a parting gift. The escort had dropped behind, dispersed. The banging of gongs had ceased, and the panoplied parasols and the huge paper butterfly had disappeared as the procession straggled back toward

the city gate. Still there followed in his wake a palanquin that was not the conveyance of the mandarin. Its curtains were drawn, making its occupant invisible.

"What," asked Fleurelle, turning to his interpreter whose mule trod at the heels of Fleurelle's Manchurian pony, "is the meaning of this palanquin?"

"That," answered the interpreter, "is the mandarin's parting gift."

"Helas!" ejaculated Fleurelle. "What need have we of that? It would have been better to give me a spare horse."

"Ah, the master forgets," smiled the interpreter. "This is the woman—the fairest of the mandarin's household."

Fleurelle's face went purple, and a sheepish grin crept to his lips as he remembered. Then an expression of anxiety spread over his face.

"He is a sad dog, this mandarin," complained Fleurelle. "He cannot take a joke."

"He is much more likely so set upon you in the night and take your wife, blaming it to a roving band of uncaptured Boxers," advised the grave interpreter.

"But surely he has not given me a woman?" queried Fleurelle, with a deeper and more puzzled expression of anxiety. "That would be too uncomfortably like the Arabian Nights—for such a circumstance as this."

"Come and see," suggested the interpreter. And while the troopers exchanged glances, giving one another the wink, Fleurelle rode up to the palanquin, drew aside the silk curtain, and gazed distractedly at the rouged and powdered features of the young Chinese woman who sat within. She gazed back at him, alternately raising and lowering her eyes, fearful and yet full of as much curiosity as was visible in the face of Fleurelle.

"She is the fairest, you say?" asked Fleurelle, turning to the interpreter, with an air of pleased discrimination overtopping his anxiety. "I can believe that, from looking at her. The old mandarin has not cheated me, eh?"

Fleurelle spoke to the woman in his own tongue, bowing in grand manner, and asking her name, her condition, and the health of her grandfather, having been advised that this was the proper etiquette. She hid her face behind her sleeves, and spoke a sharp sentence in Chinese.

"She is ashamed," explained the interpreter.

Fleurelle let fall the curtain, and looked about him, uncertain what he should do. He saw his men smirking with a sly understanding, and giving one another knowing nods, as if condoning the roguish humor of their eccentric leader. It was a gay cavalier, this, who could ride forth across a rich empire, collecting his tribute in fair women!

Fleurelle reflected soberly, and a bit angrily.

"This is a great error," he called out to his men. "It is a grave affair. I asked for a woman, that is true; but it was in jest. The stupid mandarin took my words seriously. What would you advise? We must send her back, eh?"

"You should start a harem, monsieur; that is my advice," suggested one.

Fleurelle, being a rogue, chuckled at this; then he frowned.

"It is a grave matter," he admonished. "It is not an affair for jesting."

The lady herself here took a part in determining her destiny. She had been peering shyly at Fleurelle from behind a lifted corner of one of the palanquin curtains, and seemed to sense the import of his indecision. She had an expression in her eyes which, viewed in a white woman's eyes, could have been taken for no less than unblinking admiration. She began speaking rapidly to Fleurelle's interpreter. Fleurelle looked on, pleased with the music of her voice, and undeniably interested in those black eyes that sparkled so vehemently from behind the curtain.

"She says," related the interpreter, "that she is your slave. If she does not please, and you send her back, it will be death to her."

"She will kill herself?"

A question from the interpreter brought another musical but not directly responsive shower of words from behind the curtain.

"She is not a concubine," reported the interpreter. "She is a mission woman—an *amah*—and was sold to the mandarin by

bandits who followed after the Boxers when the mission was burned and the mission people killed."

"Was it a French mission?"

"No, an English, she says."

Fleurelle was not a linguist, but he knew the "pidgin English" as it is commonly chattered by the Chinese. He went to the palanquin with a new interest, and spoke to the woman.

"You sabby English?" he inquired.

"Sabby plenty," she replied, averting her eyes.

By means of this jargon Fleurelle learned more of her story. Her husband, her husband's family, the whole clan village, were gone. They had been swept away by the Boxer fury, family gods as well, and even the village walls. The old mandarin to whom she had been sold had desired her for a wife, a secondary wife, who is no more than a concubine. But this was against the teachings of the Christians. She had learned otherwise in the mission, where she had helped with the healing of the sick. Besides, the mandarin was old and ugly, while she was young and—yes, beautiful, for verses had been written to that effect, even by the mandarin. But she had carried a dagger—this one, which she now pulled forth from beneath the folds of her silken jacket—and the old mandarin had not dared to touch her. She would have killed herself—he knew that well. So now he had given her to the white man. If the white man were to send her back, she would be sold into slavery; perhaps the old mandarin would kill her. At any rate she would kill herself. Wherefore the celestial white man would keep her, would he not, and take her away from this fate?

She looked anxiously at him from under her trembling, jet eyelashes as he hesitated. She fancied he was on the point of denying her plea, and that she must forestall this decision with some act of her own. At the house of the missionary she had been told how the foreigners make love. They touch the lips, these barbarians, and this was an act beyond the resistance of the foolish men of the West. A sigh lifted her slender shoulders, and she lowered her eyes. Then a surge of color tinged her cheeks a cherry pink under their surface of rice powder, and with a desperate determination she leaned toward him, clasped her jade-ringed fingers behind his head and pressed her thickly-rouged lips against his face. Her black eyes, close to his, made their supplementary plea, and the startled Fleurelle found himself in a state of mind that made it seem remotely probable to him that he should ever send her back to the old mandarin.

"*Bien.* My sabby. You wanchee belong wife pidgin—me?" he enquired.

She lowered her eyes and made no answer. This was puzzling to Fleurelle, but did not diminish her triumph. After all, thought the Frenchman, why not live up to one's reputation? He was known as a rogue with the women—he had boasted of it. And the reason was well known among his acquaintances. They had heard the story of the woman named Margot, whose unfaithfulness had driven him into avenging roguery. It was to this woman that Fleurelle referred when he spoke of having been married once, "sadly." He had cherished her—so great was his simple fidelity before he resolved to become a rogue—even after he had found her unfaithful. But when she had stolen away from him the children—the two small lads fashioned in his own image—he had learned how to hate. Even this might not have engendered his resolve to be a rogue to all women, had not Margot brought about the death of the boys. There had been a night of drunkenness, and the stupid Margot had overturned a lamp upon the cot where the children slept. So they had all burned together, leaving blackened and charred not only their bodies but the soul of Fleurelle.

Under other circumstances, doubtless, Fleurelle would not have hesitated over the Chinese woman. Prudence, only, seemed a deterrent here.

Perhaps the impatience of his men, and their jocular comment on the situation, decided the matter for him in the end. He gave the order to advance, and rode along moodily beside the palanquin with its groaning coolies.

There was ample time for reflection, for the cavalcade moved slowly. The guards had to halt frequently to allow the slow-moving palanquin to catch up. It was evident that this addition to the expedition already was a hindrance. It might even become a source of danger, for if the delay should be great night would find them still in the open road, a prey for roving bandits or the unsubdued Boxer bands that still infested the country.

It occurred to Fleurelle, too, that the presence of a Chinese woman in his train would not be the easiest thing to explain to the mandarin of the next walled city. Perhaps he might offer her to his next host as a slight token of his estimation. The thought brought a smile to his lips, but he found he could not contemplate it comfortably when remembrance of those black eyes and the touch of her red lips came up between him and the idea.

It was necessary, at any rate, to make greater speed, so he abandoned the palanquin with its nearly exhausted bearers, and faced them back on the road to Cho-Chow. Then he took the young woman behind him on his own horse. Progress was more rapid, indeed, but the timorous clasp of her arms about him did not strengthen his half-formed resolve to resign her to the next mandarin.

Yet to resign her to someone became imperative, because of an incident that at length brought a climax to Fleurelle's predicament. The Chinese woman's clasp of his shoulders became less secure. She would have fallen if he had not caught her, and at last carried her before him, with her head rolling wearily against his shoulder. She was unaccustome', it seemed, to this heroic mode of travel.

Cursing himself a bit for the folly that had brought matters to such a pass, Fleurelle halted before a clay-walled village, and sent the interpreter for the village headman. To that white-haired individual, leaning on a great staff and surrounded by nude, round-eyed children, he consigned his feminine burden, not without tears on her part, and prolonged colloquy on the part of all concerned. The woman he pacified with solemn promises to return for her, and to take her back to the coast to be a Christian and his devoted slave; and the headman he compensated with silver *sycee*, weighed out to him by the interpreter in generous measure.

The impatience of his men had grown to real anxiety when they were again in the deep dust of the highroad, for night was advancing and the gray ramparts of the next walled city were not yet visible.

This anxiety was not misplaced, for a sudden clatter of firearms assailed them before they had been long overtaken by the twilight. Bullets sang over their heads and stirred the dust at their feet. Fleurelle's horse started violently, and then stood still, trembling. Without command, the small cavalcade wheeled about, and amid the curses of the French troopers galloped away from the ambush. Figures moving in the half light of the fields rode parallel with them, firing as they rode, and the French troopers, recovering from their surprise, joined in with their own carbines. Neither party did any apparent damage, but the flight continued, with the French gaining, and at last distancing pursuit down the long stretch of gullied road over which they had come. It was some time before they noted that Fleurelle was not among them. In the turmoil of flight they had not seen his horse fall, and in the midst of their own shouting and firing they had not heard his call for help.

The loss of his horse had not been Fleurelle's only affliction. A bullet had found its mark in his left forearm. He lay behind his wounded horse for a time, using his revolvers against the mounted figures that thundered past him along the roadway, or in the fields. There seemed no end of the attacking party. Though the fields were full of them he determined to crawl out among the furrows, or find better concealment among the willows that lifted their scant foliage against the last vestige of light in the western sky. Concealment was difficult, and loss of strength began to follow loss of blood from his wounded arm. He kept on, crawling on hands and knees, running a few steps when he dared, toward a cluster of trees that held out vague promises of buildings. In

this manner he groped his way at length to a wooden gateway in a low wall, and over it painfully into an enclosure at one end of which he could make out dimly a memorial arch such as he had often seen in private burial grounds of the well-to-do. Beyond the archway was a small building sheltered by a cluster of great elms—doubtless the honorary dwelling place of spirits of the dead. The house was without doors, and the dark interior echoed emptily as he threw himself down inside, and struggled with a rough bandage for his arm.

The sound of gunfire had become distant; then, as if the fleeing Frenchmen had returned in a counter-charge, it was renewed, at nearer range. His comrades, Fleurelle thought with satisfaction, would soon beat their way back to him, and after recovery from the surprise of the ambush would give this band of bandits, or Boxers—whatever they were—the reward they merited.

It had been the boast of the French barracks in those months of guerrilla strife since the great siege, that one Frenchman was a match for fifty Boxers. But there was something about this attack, when Fleurelle came to think of it, that did not resemble Boxer tactics. It was rare that they attacked armed men. Their prey mostly were defenseless villagers. As for out-and-out bandits, they would be likely to pick rich and less troublesome quarry. No, there was in this attack the suggestion of a more organized, better directed effort.

Fleurelle could percieve that particularly now, when a hundred or more rifles, blazing methodically in the distance, seemed to have halted the counter-attack of his escort. The thought struck him that this was the revenge of the old mandarin for the drunken affront of demanding a woman of his harem. It was perhaps the only revenge possible to the mandarin, who scarcely would have dared violence within his own gates, and in such manner as would bring the certain punishment of the "foreign devils" who overran the land.

Half-convinced of the correctness of this theory, Fleurelle lay waiting, undecided as to what should be done for his own safety, cursing his Arabian Nights folly, and relieving his mind with vows of new savagery against womankind.

When the sound of rifle fire ceased, and it was evident, after hours of waiting, that no immediate relief from his escort was likely—if, indeed, there was anything left, now, of his escort—Fleurelle concocted a feeble plan of action. He must remain where he was until daylight, at least. To go blundering about now, hammering at the gates of a village, would be to invite destruction by inhabitants who doubtless were in a state of frantic alarm. No lights were visible over the stretch of country before him, and there was no sound except the rustling of the elm leaves in the night wind. He was alone with the ancestors to whose house of death he offered the profanation of his gory presence.

When morning came, after an eternity of restlessness, there was an unmistakable fever in the veins of Fleurelle. Instead of rising to review the situation and take steps for his own safety, he lay listlessly on the stone floor, seemingly indifferent to what went on about him. He took no great interest even in the farmer's boy who brought goats to feed on the long graveyard grass, and who made round-eyed discovery of the "foreign devil's" presence there. Abandoning his bleating goats, the boy scrambled over the low fence, in too much of a hurry to bother about the gate, and vanished in a cloud of dust and flying heels, toward the walls of a village.

A few minutes later Fleurelle was the center of an astonished group of men, who talked volubly, but seemed capable of no particular activity. Fleurelle stared back at them, dully, more interested in the throbbing pain in his wounded arm than in what fate was in store for him. He began talking to them, vaguely, and at length deliriously, and they seemed fascinated at sound of this unknown tongue. One of them brought water, and in the moment of lucidity that followed the drinking of it Fleurelle was reminded that doubtless the sole anxiety of these chattering men about him was not over his safety, but over the profanation already suffered by this place sacred to ancestors, and the

crowning profanation his unhallowed death there would be.

Cursing them for the pain it caused him to move, Fleurelle began to drag himself from the building, and into the meagre shade of the elms. The crowd about him, larger now, made bold to assist him, and after a protracted colloquy picked him up at last and hurried with him through the gate of the enclosure, across a wide field, and among some decrepit buildings that stood outside the village walls.

They left him in a bare shelter-house, lying in a corner among filth and dust, and he tossed there throughout the interminable day. At times, until all conscious effort of mind ceased, he made fitful starts toward the open, always giving up from the pain of the movement and the indifference bred of the fever that now burned at its height.

The interpreter found him there toward evening, and with the interpreter, scolding at the crowd that bantered her for such unconventionality of behavior, came the Chinese woman who had been the cause of Fleurelle's misfortunes. The news of the "foreign devil's" plight had travelled rapidly among the inhabitants of the neighboring villages, and the interpreter, emerging from the hiding place where he had crept at sound of the first marauder's bullet, reached the place where they had left the woman in time to serve as her escort in a search for her master.

It was a scandal over which the village elders shook their heads in profound disapproval. Where was it written among the precepts of Confucius that a Chinese woman might minister openly and without shame to a man not of her family, to say nothing of a barbarian from beyond the realm of the Middle Kingdom? Still, they knew this woman—she who had deserted the prayer-mats of the Buddhas, and gone into the church of the missionary. She was of the Li family, the ruins of whose village lay not a day's journey away. This was the woman, it was well known, who had been sold to the old mandarin—the woman whose Christian husband had been slain, and whose two man-children had been carried away to slavery.

Night and day, in the house of the head man of the village, where she had him carried, this woman of the Li family hovered over Fleurelle, bandaging his festering wound as she had seen wounds dressed in the house of the missionary, administering doubtfully the nauseous concoctions recommended by the native doctor, or answering in her own soft dialect the ravings of her patient's voice in his unintelligible tongue. She found it necessary to battle not only with the death that hovered over her master, but with the fear of the villagers that should the presence among them of a foreigner become known to a band of Boxers the penalty would be the destruction of all. She was obliged to compromise with them in their desire to set Fleurelle forth upon the highway to await the disposition of the gods. It was arranged that should the Boxers come, she and the foreigner should be sent out promptly as propitiation and just sacrifice.

Fleurelle was conscious of none of these things. He was too far into the mist that hovers over the line between the quick and the dead. He was still uncomprehending on that morning a week after the disaster to his expedition, when a score of French troopers from Peking clattered through the village gate, led by his interpreter. The French legation doctor shook his head over Fleurelle's condition, marvelling nevertheless that he should have found such a sick man alive. He shook his head, too, with a different sentiment, at sight of the exhausted little Chinese woman who hovered shyly in a corner of the room. He was no stranger to the jealous proprietorship that lighted her eyes. Neither was he unfamiliar with the symptoms he perceived of womanly fidelity—symptoms that are alike under cover of any color of skin.

It so happened, on a certain morning, after the woman of the Li family had been established with the English missionary in Peking, that Fleurelle went there, with a chastened soul, having definitely in his mind the idea of making her his wife after the manner prescribed by the church. There was no symptom of roguery in his mind as he talked to her in the garden

compound. There was, instead, when he left, a symptom of profound perplexity; for the Chinese woman, kissing him this time with unrouged lips—in the manner prescribed for mandarins of the West—politely and humbly, as befitted his slave, declined to marry him. Her eyes were full of tears enough to have melted her resolution, but her soul was too full of religious admonitions. She remembered the wisdom of Confucius, by whom it was written that a widow must not re-marry as a "first wife." Only as a concubine might she enter again the married state. But she was mindful, too, of the words of the Christian missionary. It was not well for one who walked in the way of the Christ to become a concubine. The decision was not of her heart, but of her mind perplexed with religious precepts—a case not greatly at variance with the sad fidelity of these women of the East.

From being a rogue with the women Fleurelle drifted into oddly innocuous pursuits. He spent many weeks, for instance, nosing about among the lower treaty ports, doing little that could be put down in the records of his work as a commercial attache of the French legation. It was noteworthy, however, that after a certain escapade in which he figured as the fiery white man who pitched overboard the captain of a Chinese junk laden with slave children, he returned soberly to Peking, with two little Chinese lads who addressed him as "Grandpa." He arranged that these urchins should wander into the compound of the missionary at a moment when the woman of the Li family was visible there, walking among the garden paths. Peering slyly through chinks in the bamboo wall, "Grandpa Fleurelle" witnessed a sight that brought back bitter-sweet memories of a pair of knickerbockered French lads and of a lamentable woman who was known as Margot.

Fleurelle's friends began to chide him for being an unsociable old fogy. From a roisterer and a spender he had become, they observed, a close-fisted grubber. He had the habit of smiling vaguely at such banter.

"You see," he would explain, "I have grandsons—two of them—magnificient urchins. They must be sent to college when they have arrived at the proper age. You comprehend, my friends?"

They would laugh at this—these friends; for it was absurd to think of that rogue, Fleurelle, as a grandfather. Moreover, they knew well enough the lamentable facts about the woman Margot, whose infidelity was understood to have convinced him of the unfaithfulness of all women. So it was doubtless only a wry jest, this talk of grandsons.

ANOTHER story of the orient by Carroll K. Michener will appear in the June number. THE SHRINE OF AN-LING is the title, and the story concerns a certain American sailor, a petty officer named Davis, and the Chinese girl, An-ling, whom he encounters in the archway of a tenement alley in Shanghai. And back in San Francisco, there is a girl who writes: "You're always talking about the Chinese girls..... I do hope you're not going to figure in any Madame Butterfly scandal."

THE CAPTIVATION OF WASH HANKS

By JANE HICKS

Wash is a victim of inertia. Cupid might shoot a whole quiver of arrows at him without making a direct hit. It is rather the instinct of self-preservation than the grand passion which keeps him from languishing on the mourner's bench.

WASH Hanks, humped upon his wagon seat, spat and bade his old gray nag "Gid epp" as each of the vehicles following his own turned off the main road of the Virginia mountain late one September afternoon. By virtue of being husband of the deceased, he had led the slow, silent procession to and from the "burying ground," speaking to his horse alone, and that only when the leavetakings of the neighbors had made him feel that something was required of him. The last one having turned off, Wash continued slowly and joltingly up the shady, stony road until horse and wagon seemed to run down, like pieces of old machinery, at the gate rudely constructed of small beech limbs, with shoe-leather hinges. He eased down from the wagon seat and scraped the gate back across the brown dirt to the hard little ridge of accumulated scrapings.

He was home! The damp coolness of mountain evenings was beginning to spread in the air; the mellow golden light and long shadows seemed like tangible, live things. A few chickens and pigs foraging restlessly around the little clearing emphasized the hopeless shiftlessness of the weather-beaten cabin, the toppling shed, the chicken boxes, the tumble-down fences, and the grassless and littered yard. Several deformed, scrubby apple and peach trees forlornly told of erstwhile spasmodic attempts at providence—or were the trees mere accidents?

Wash laid his greenish coat on the seat of the wagon, unhitched and turned the emaciated horse loose in the yard, left the wagon—Piggy Scruggs's wagon—where it stood, and taking his coat, slouched toward the house. The pigs grunted as they watched him; the chickens followed with low, staccato notes, pleading for their supper. The horse, that was his only income, looked after him dejectedly. Wash stopped at the edge of the small, low porch. It had no railing and no steps. He sat on the edge where he had always sat while Lizzie worked. Nothing but his little brown, dusty clearing and trees—the numberless trees of the mountain! A curl of light smoke down to the left told him that Piggy Scruggs was getting her supper.

Still, the chickens were asking for food, but Wash seemed to be waiting for something. Lizzie had always fed the chickens till she was "took good an' sick," and even then, every day, she had told Wash how much—or rather how little—to give them. She had always told Wash to do the things he did, everything, that is, but smoke his pipe, which he seemed to do not as a result of thought but of instinct. Now, he missed direction! No matter how long he sat, no one would tell him to feed the chickens or the pigs or the horse, nor to hoe the little, mangy-looking garden, nor to go over to Wiggins's for the daily quart of milk. Neither would anyone call him to prepare meals. He began to think of Lizzie.

"Lizzie always was a-ailin'," he had told his neighbor, Piggy Scruggs, when she had come at Lizzie's death to compare the details with those of her husband's, which had occured several months before.

"Was it a misery in her chest? Sam Scruggs's was something awful!" Piggy was very stout and sociable and gaily dressed, with her hair parted on the side and her waist open far enough to insure against her getting overheated.

"'Twa'n't no place special," Wash told her, scratching, on the back of his head, a spot that always itched when he spoke, and turning to go out upon the porch. He did not leave because he minded being in the room with Lizzie's body or with Piggy while she "fixed" it, but he was not a talker. His conversations were to the ear what his dull gray eyes, leathery, murky skin and scant, colorless hair were to the eye. Lizzie had not talked, either. She had just worked. Now, he missed her.

He turned and looked into the shadowy little room—living room, dining room, bedroom and kitchen, it was—dimly discerned the homemade bed with the suggestive depression in the middle, saw the cup and the plate on the table where he had eaten the frugal meal that Piggy Scruggs had prepared for him before he started "totin' the coffin box to the buryin' ground." It was lonely. He turned away again and looked at the smoke curling up from Piggy Scruggs's chimney. He wondered what she was cooking. She was a mighty strong woman, able, Wash reckoned, to do "a sight o' work." Sam Scruggs had been a hard worker, but Wash made no connection between the two facts. He pulled out his pipe, lighted and puffed it as the twilight deepened.

Suddenly, he heard his gate being dragged open. He pulled himself up and slouched over to an apple tree whence he could see John Wiggins coming with the milk.

"Reckon ye didn't feel like comin' fer it 's evenin'," Wiggins sympathized, ridding himself of a large amount of tobacco juice. "Thought I'd jes' tote 'tawn over toe ye."

Wash took the bucket, looked steadily into it for a few moments, then, removing his pipe from his mouth, drank the milk. He had not gathered the eggs to give John in payment.

"Warmish," he remarked, returning the bucket. He spat, slowly, as he would, replaced his pipe, let his hands slide deep into his trousers pockets, and looked at the smoke rising from Piggy's chimney.

"Wal," John broke the silence, "reckon I'll be movin' on." He waited a few minutes longer. "Good tun-out, 'twas." He knew Wash's aversion to spoken words, but, he reasoned hopefully, if a man can't talk when his wife has a funeral and about how many turned out for it, when will he talk? But his lead fell dead.

"Reckon ye'll be lonely," he ventured again.

"Yas," Wash rewarded him, attending to that spot on the back of his head.

John felt that he had struck a fertile vein.

"Yas," he coaxed, "ye'll do it all yerself, now."

He waited. Wash only pulled at his pipe. John looked at him out of the corner of his eye. He felt that being a pallbearer entitled one to something.

"Wal, reckon I'll be goin'," he concluded. He thought of his eggs, but he didn't mention them. "Comin' over to the cuttin' to-night, ain't ye?" he asked, in turning.

"What fer?" Wash asked around his pipe stem. He had not heard John invite the others at the burying.

"Goin' to cut the watermelons," John told him. "Fust ones, and pretty good, too, they soun' like. All the folks a-comin'. Bring yer fiddle along."

Wash scratched his head and pointed with his thumb over his shoulder down the mountain.

"Buried ma wife," he said. A dim feeling of respect for the conventions seemed to prompt the words. His feelings were like aged ruins.

"Better come," John urged, as his eyes roved about the shiftless clearing. "It'll cheer ye up a bit. Lonesome here." With both hands, as the bucket slid down one arm, he took off what the moths and the weather had left of a dull felt hat and, after a moment replaced it further over his forehead. Then, moving off:

"Bring yer fiddle. We'll want some chunes."

Wash stood alone and motionless while damp night crept up over the mountain. Clear and ominous from afar came the baying of a hound. Slackly, Wash went back to his seat on the edge of the porch. The chickens were going noisily and restlessly to bed; a pig loudly crunched a corky apple that had just fallen. Wash

went in and lighted the lamp. It sputtered and smoked, for it needed oil. Reaching for his fiddle on the corner shelf, he puffed out the feeble flicker and returned to the porch. He did not draw the bow but rested the fiddle across his lap, his hands on its ends. For sometime he sat.

A peal of laughter. It was Piggy's, and came from the direction of John Wiggins's. "Folks a-comin' to the cuttin'," it told Wash. Another laugh, a man's. Wash walked slowly around to the back corner of the cabin and dodgingly peered through the dark to where a small twinkle, caught now and then through scarcely shifting trees, marked Wiggins's house. As he straightened up, Piggy's laugh came again. Yes, Piggy was a good worker—a good, strong woman—and Sam Scruggs had left things so that she could make a good living, more than she would need for just herself. She must live lonely. He looked around furtively. Loneliness was creeping, tightening about him like a shroud.

He went back to the porch and got his fiddle. The call of companionship was to him like the sight of food to a hungry animal. Unconsciously he quickened his steps as he left his gate behind in the darkness. A sluggish fusion of ideas suddenly brought him to wonder if any of Lizzie's kin would be there. He stopped—the theatre of a miserable conflict between his inclination, his duty, and his fear of what they might say to him. He had long since ceased to smart under their vituperations, accused of being the laziest man alive, and scolded because Lizzie was working herself to death for him as wasn't worth it. But their tongues were sharp, and he didn't know what they might say on this occasion. Then, suddenly, inclination snatched and held on high an idea, bright and clear. It was all Wash's own, and it was to him like a defensive weapon caught from the hand of a death-dealing foe. He turned his steps toward Wiggins's. "And besides," feebly flourishing a weaker weapon, "they want my fiddlin'."

"Here he is." Piggy Scruggs announced his arrival from the little vine-covered porch. She was livelier than her neighbors, for she went "down" oftener than they. Her sister's large, jolly family lived at the foot of the mountain.

"I was jest a-bettin' middlin' to butter ye'd be here," she laughed loudly. She had on the same bright pink waist and bright blue cotton skirt that she had worn to the burying.

Wash laid his fiddle on the porch, spat, gripped his pipe in one corner of his mouth, and, with the awkwardness of unused muscles, gave his shoulders a hitch and slid his thumbs into his vest armholes.

"Wal," he drawled, furtively sighting Lizzie's kin as one hand slipped behind head, "Lizzie always *did* say as I set aroun' too much. I thought, now, as how she's went—"

After a short pause for comprehension, several admitted, "Yas, she did."

Wash drew a long puff, pulled his chair up near to Piggy's with the sliding looks and movements of a dog recalled for a pat, after receiving a kick, and began his fiddling for the evening. The rest resumed their stale jokes and their coarse fun, nudging one another occasionally.

"Wash a-makin' up to Piggy."

Wash was saying never a word, just a fiddlin'; but in his tunes and his movements was a new spirit—the spirit of purpose.

At the end of the evening, he left with Piggy and her sister's half-grown boy who was "staying the summer" with her, doing the plowing and the chores.

"Gosh," Piggy began in valley slang, "won't I be glad to hit that feather bed. That bed's good sleepin'. I can't make out how nobody kin sleep on a corn-shucks bed." (Wash's and Lizzie's was of corn-shucks.) "'Specially in the winter time. Sam Scruggs used to say as no matter how hard he'd of worked, he'd know he'd feel good soon's he got in our bed. Gosh, it's good. Just lay there. Don't never wanter git up of a mornin'. I says sometimes, ef somebody was only to bring me my bacon and cabbage and corn pone while I was a-layin' there—m-m-M! I got my whole cellar half full o' cabbages, pretty near, for the winter; and the hogs gittin' ready to kill. I'll eat this winter. Whew! Won't I eat, though!"

They had reached Wash's gate. He spat, scratched his head below his hat and left them. He remembered that the lamp was empty. He found the corner shelf for his fiddle, and put his hat and coat on the table as he bumped against it in the dark. He did not take off his Sunday pants nor shoes nor shirt. Lizzie was not there to tell him to. He bolted the door, found the bed, and lay down as he was. For the first time, he noticed the bumps in his corn-shuck mattress. How soft a feather bed would have been to his joints and angles. He thought of the cabbage and pork and other things for the winter, or rather, sensed them sluggishly as he dropped off to sleep.

When he awoke in the morning, chilled and stiff and hungry he sat on the edge of the bed and looked at the cupboard. He knew that there was a little corn meal left from the year's supply. The scant, new crop had not been taken to the mill. He knew there was a little salt to make palatable an egg which he might find in one nest-box or another. He knew there was nothing else to eat. Yesterday's soiled dishes were still on the table. His hat and coat had been laid on them in the dark. There was no one building a fire nor cooking the meal nor hunting the eggs. Slowly and painfully he rose and went out upon the porch. Over the autumn tree-tops curled up the line of blue smoke from Piggy's chimney. Wash went back for his hat, closed the door, and with never a glance at the hungry chickens and animals—what rudder Lizzie had left him—surrendered himself to the current.

Before he reached the new, well-hung gate to Piggy's clearing, he saw her come to the door of the house and look out in his direction. Piggy had a little flower garden in front of her house, protected from her animals by a rustic fence. As Wash opened the gate she came to the door again, a sizzling skillet in her hand.

"Jest a-settin' down. If ye're hungry, ye're welcome."

"Wal, I could eat a bite," Wash reckoned, going up the porch steps and in to the table, already laid for three.

"Ye walk like ye got the rheumatiz," Piggy remarked. "Middlin' to butter ye slept cold last night. Men folks would die right off if women folks wasn't here to take keer on 'em," with a loud laugh. "Sam Scruggs taken sick them nights I went down, and when I come back, I couldn't never git him up again." She put a huge piece of pone on Wash's plate, soaking it in the hot bacon fat. "This here boy's picked up since he's been here with me," she remarked, indicating her sister's boy. "Don't know what I'm goin' to do fer a man, now he's a-goin'." Wash held the ready mouthful poised a moment between his mouth and the plate. Piggy went on. "He's got to git his schoolin'—"

The boy, a great, red-faced, raw-boned specimen, opened his mouth in astonished protest, but Piggy waved a fat hand and arm at him.

"You jest shet right up. I know what yer mammy told me. An' I can't stay here 'thout no man. Looks like I don't know *what* to do. So lonely and so cold all winter. 'Tain't so much work as 'tis lonely. Eatin' by myself."

Wash sat for a while after he had finished his breakfast, smoking his pipe and watching Piggy as she hustled about, cleaning up. Lizzie hadn't been so lively. He looked through the open doorway into the next room. The feather bed was a foot thick, and smooth and inviting, with a red, white and green quilt on it.

Wash rose. "Thank ye kindly fer the victuals," he said, and left.

Piggy watched him from the door. *She* was not the kind to ask *no* man if he was coming back, but if he knew what was good for him. Anyhow, he'd better fetch her wagon home. She didn't give it to him jest cause she let him tote that box down the mountain in it.

Several hours later, she heard the slow jolting of a wagon. She reckoned Wash was fetching hers home. She looked out and saw the wagon swaying over the stony road, threatening every minute to spill its load.

"Fetched yer fixins, did ye?" Piggy called lightly from the doorway. "I 'lowed when ye got up thar an' seed how lonely 'twar, ye'd be back."

She went out to help him unload. Together, they turned the chickens loose with her chickens, the pigs with her pigs, and the horse into the lot with hers. They put the chairs and the table on the ground. Wash immediately sat down on one of the chairs.

"Jes might's well draw the wagon in thar," Piggy said, pointing to the weather-proof shed. "We'll use mine when we go down to the preacher's arter dinner."

Alone, she drew the wagon under cover. "Better come in an' res' yerself," she advised on her way back to him.

She picked up the table and strode off with it through the garden gate. Wash smiled a little—not a mean smile, but one of content—as he followed her with a chair. He put it on the porch, sat on it, and, scratching his head and spitting, said:

"Lively here. Nicern up thar. 'Tain't so pore."

THE JUNE NUMBER

will contain a story by Chart Pitt entitled EIGHTY RODS NORTH. Caribou Knowlton is a man who has followed the gold-lure into places the map makers have never heard of; but always he has wandered in a loveless land, where the lilting laugh of a woman has rarely stirred the echoes. When the loneliness and the bacon and beans pall upon him, he goes over the trail to town to put his legs under the pie counter once more and order from the menu on the wall. Eating in a restaurant affects him oddly; the Gold Pan Club offers relaxation, but he passes it by and strikes back into the hills with a new incentive to labor.

An abandoned hotel challenges the imagination, at least a writer's imagination. SPRINGS ETERNAL *by Weare Holbrook,* another story for June, is similar in setting to Mr. Clausen's story, ROOM TWENTY HAS A TENANT, in this number. When the sulphur springs, the sole drawing card of the Gath Hotel, cease to flow, the proprietor is left with an empty house and the autographs on the yellow pages of the hotel register to remind him of better days. It is a colorful tale, spiced with the atmosphere of decay and memories of the glorious seventies, and relieved by the humor of the situation when a realty corporation includes the hotel property in its plans for civic improvement.

THE QUITTERS

By HAROLD FRANCIS WHITE

The voice of the city sometimes loses its seductive appeal when those who come to hear it find standing room only.

COUPLE of bowls, plainer medium and mashed, side of sauerkraut, fry two over with a stack of drys, all up together, and for the love o' Mike, rush 'em a little, cookie."

Della Summers, member in good standing of the table force at Art Leroy's big hash emporium, ducked skillfully through the crowd of hurrying waitresses and kitchen assistants, and reached the serving table, where she plumped down her tray with a bang, and made her voice heard above the din of shouted orders and the clatter of dishes.

"Where's my T-bone and French fried, cookie?" she queried, as she hastily ranged on her tray various plates and bowls and platters, containing viands to tempt the palates of the hungry supper crowd.

"Comin' up," rumbled the fat cook, making a hazardous flop of a big pan of fried potatoes with one hand, and wiping the streaming perspiration from his brow with the other.

"Comin' up," grunted Della, "they been comin' up for twenty minutes, and the gent in there's wearing out his Waterbury lookin' at it. He'll be bawling me out in a minute and—here, nix on that sleight of hand stuff, Minnie, that's my pork order. Just because you're trying to make a hit with that fashion plate at the corner table is no reason the rest of us has got to play the benches till he's fed. Now, don't get sore, Min, but honestly, you're too nice a girl to be dangling around that guy. Works in the hosiery at Frisbie's. Why, say, he'd die of shock if they offered to raise him to twelve a week.

"My T-bone. 'Comin' up' was right. Cookie, you're a sixty horse-power angel, and I love you if you are fat." She balanced the dishes skillfully on top of her loaded tray, smiled dazzlingly at the scowling cook, and with a quick swing hoisted the heavy load to her shoulder and was gone through the swinging doors into the dining room.

In spite of himself the cook's scowl vanished, and he grinned a sticky, perspiring grin at the smiling Minnie as he turned again to the stove.

"Some girl," he muttered approvingly, as he bent to stir up the fire in the big range.

The T-bone customer looked like a thundercloud when Della entered the dining room. But when the juicy steak was placed before him, with the side dishes smoking around it, like busy tugboats hovering about an ocean liner, his brow relaxed a little. The catsup and the Worcestershire appeared before he could ask for them, and fresh icewater clinked in his glass.

And when Della, bringing his coffee, asked him how many lumps, bending close to catch his answer, the elusive fragrance of her brown hair mingled with the succulent odor of the steak, and his resentment vanished like mist before the sunshine.

"Two, please," he said, smiling up at her, and when she had gone to attend to her other customers, he followed her with his eyes, echoing under his breath the cook's comment, "Some girl." Also, when he had eaten to repletion and departed, he left under his napkin a substantial souvenir of appreciation for service rendered.

At eight o'clock the supper rush was nearly over, and the girls whose day was ended with the coming of that hour hastily brought the dessert orders of belated cus-

tomers and got away to the little dressing room at one side of the kitchen, where a buzz of excited conversation rose as they hastily divested themselves of the neat black and white uniforms, to don street clothes.

"Come on away from that glass, Sue Baker, think you got a mortgage on it? I got to meet a fellow in five minutes, and he gets sore if he has to wait."

"Huh. Who is it? That fat guy with the polished dome, I bet. Well, I guess his time ain't worth more than seven dollars a minute, an' I got a date myself. Say, Mame, what're you and Babe chewing about. Goin' out with a couple of guys, I suppose."

"Don't get curious, Sue. Gee, girlie, that hat's some little creation. Blue looks great on you, and that hood effect's just what you ought to wear. Where under the sun —here, lady love, toss me that button hook. Gee, but these new slippers of mine are a squeeze."

"What'd you expect?" came roguishly from the other side of the room, where a tall girl struggled with a refractory wisp of wavy hair. "Trying to shove a number five foot in a two shoe."

"Number five foot. All right for you, Miss Pansy, but if I had as liberal a floor plan as you got, I wouldn't be sayin' anything about feet. Hello, Della, don't you wish you was off now, so you could chase around. A fellow in here to-night said he wanted to meet you." She looked quizzically at Della, standing in the doorway.

"Who was it?" Della's tone was bored. "The snipe in the bow tie, sitting next to the aisle? Uh-huh. Well, I can't say I'm crazy about meeting him. I saw him sizing me up."

"Pretty fine little guy," remarked Mame, adjusting her hat.

"Fine little guy. Oh, lord, Mame, your taste ain't all in your mouth, is it? Say, I'll bet that lady boy wears corsets. And he smells of Trailing Arbutus like a French bouquet. Mame, I like to chase around with a man, but I've got no liking for these Willie boys. Some girls seem to think anything that wears pants and is free with his loose change will do for a gentleman friend. Nope! It don't look that way to me at all."

Mame gazed earnestly in the glass, dabbing at her straight little nose with her powder puff. "Della," she drawled, "strange as it may seem, I honestly believe you're stuck on that chap that's carrying dishes in this joint."

"Stuck on him, no. I'm stuck on nobody, Mame, but I'd pick that boy to win over any of these walking clothes models that come in here and try to make dates with us girls."

"Dick is a good looking fellow, all right," admitted Mame, preparing to leave, "and maybe you're right about these other guys. But I got a fellow waiting for me, and I'll have to break away. He ain't so big and husky as your country boy, and maybe he likes his booze and coffin nails a little too well. But he's a swell dresser, and a good spender, and you're welcome to your Dick. Tra la, Della."

The girls had all gone, and the room was deserted. Della turned back to the dining room. A few diners still lingered. There would be little doing until the theatre crowd came in, and then for an hour there would be a rush. Della, and two or three of the other girls remained on duty and took care of this midnight crowd.

One of the girls yawned languidly on a stool near the rear end of the long counter. Dick Baxter, the subject of Mame's comment, was busy at one of the tables, loading a big tray with dirty dishes. He picked it up as Della entered, and with the heavy load on his shoulder, walked toward the kitchen. Della made some bantering remark as he passed, and his eyes twinkled merrily at her.

There were no customers at her tables, and she sat down beside the other girl at the counter for a few minutes. Two young men entered and made an eager rush for one of Della's tables. They took a long time to order, joking and laughing with Della, and when the meal was brought they lingered over it, calling her on one pretense or another, palpably trying to make an impression. They failed miserably, but they thought they succeeded, and Della was rewarded for her flattering

deception when she found a tip under each plate, after they had gone. Several other customers followed them, and it was nearly ten o'clock when the last one had gone.

Della strolled into the kitchen, and to the rear door, whence came the sound of low-voiced singing. The cook sat comfortably on the doorstep, pipe in hand, the smoke curling lazily about his head. Beside him sat a saucy little red-haired waitress, her chin in her hands, and outside, on a cracker box, lolled Dick, his back against the wall, and his feet stretched out comfortably. Another girl leaned against the casing behind the trio, and all four were singing softly.

"When you wore a tulip, a sweet yellow tulip,
And I wore a big red rose;
When you caressed me, 'twas then Heaven blessed me,
What a blessing, no one knows."

Della stepped between the two on the doorstep, and seated herself on another cracker box, close beside the one Dick was occupying. He acknowledged her presence with a smiling nod, without ceasing his song.

"You made life cheery, when you called me 'dearie,'
'Twas down where the blue grass grows;
Your lips were sweeter than julep, when you wore a tulip,
And I wore a big red rose."

It was pleasant in the dim alley, and the air, after the excessive heat of the day, was caressingly cool and soft. Moonlight flooded the narrow space, and in its yellow light the prosaic, ugly outlines of barrels, boxes, garbage cans, and all the cluttering refuse of the alley, were mellowed and softened.

Far up the alley, in the street, Della could see the myriad night moths darting and circling in the dazzling radiance of an electric arc. The rumble and clangor of the street came softened to the ears of the little group in the doorway.

"The Spanish cavalier stood in his retreat,
And on his guitar played a tune, dear—"

The cook's rumbling bass began the song, Dick's vibrant tenor took it up, and the others joined in. Dick's hand touched Della's resting on the edge of the box, and in the darkness his big fingers gripped hers stealthily. The little hand did not move, and the singing went on without pause.

"Say, darling, say, when I'm far away.
Sometimes you may think of me, dear—"

Another shadow darkened the doorway, and the singers looked up to see who had joined the group. A young man, handsomely dressed, but with flushed face, and clothes somewhat awry, stood in the doorway. Recognizing the proprietor's son, Harry Leroy, they all nodded. Leroy smiled tolerantly, and leaned against the doorpost until the song was finished.

The group, all but Dick, rose and came inside, the cook knocking the ashes from his pipe as he walked to the stove. Della stopped for a moment at the serving table, wiping her tray with a cloth, while the other girls hurried into the dining room, where the advance guard of the theatre crowd was already entering.

Leroy, slightly unsteady on his feet, walked over to the serving table where Della stood. "Evenin', girlie," he remarked, with an ingratiating leer.

Della resented his close proximity, and the leering tone. "Good evening, Mr. Leroy," she said coolly, and drew quietly away from him.

The cook was busy at the range, and Dick, outside, was still singing softly to himself. Leroy stepped closer, and the girl, a little frightened, turned from the table to face him.

"Say, little one, I like you—liked you first time I saw you—better ever since—you bet, I'm strong for you—'n say, how'd you like a little party to-night, you and me—just you an' me—sure, you understand—all right, eh?" His flushed face was close to hers, and, thoroughly alarmed, she shrank back from him.

"No, Mr. Leroy," she said unsteadily, "thank you, but I—I don't—I can't—not to-night, please."

He stood for a moment, looking at her, steadying himself with one hand on the serving table; and the frightened girl saw

the slow flame of anger kindling in his drooping eyes. The cook had turned, and stood silently watching them, a mixing spoon held in his hand.

"Looka here, girlie, I ain't used to takin' 'no' from you young hash slingers—an' I don't intend to begin now. You know who I am—and no rag chewin' goes—not with this boy—get me? You're comin'—you little—" With a quick motion he reached out and jerked the girl into his arms, his sodden breath beating in her face. Screaming, she struggled to free herself.

The cook dropped the spoon, and, with an exclamation, started around the table toward them. He had not taken two steps when a human avalanche burst through the rear door, a heavy fist thudded sharply, and Leroy went quietly to sleep on the floor. He lay for a moment quite still, while the three watched him.

The door into the dining room opened suddenly, and Art Leroy stood looking at them, a big cigar uptilted in his mouth, and a scowl on his heavy-jowled features. Behind him peered the frightened faces of the two waitresses.

"Who's responsible for this?" Leroy snapped, biting savagely at his cigar. The cook stood silent, supporting the young man, who now stood swaying dizzily.

"Please, Mr. Leroy, I—" began Della.

"I guess you can hold me responsible, Mr. Leroy," interrupted Dick. "Your son got a little too familiar with this girl, and I knocked him down. That's all there is to it."

Leroy's eyes flamed, but he controlled himself.

"You were hired to carry dishes, young fellow, not to do police duty. Go to the cashier and get your time."

Dick nodded. "All right, if that's the way you look at it." He started toward the door.

"Wait a minute, Dick." Della's voice trembled with anger. "You can give me my time, too, Mr. Leroy. You—you stick up for that puppy, you—why, I wouldn't work for you any longer if you doubled my pay." She stamped her foot, facing him with fiery eyes, then turned to follow Dick, who had stopped near the door.

The elder Leroy stood dumb, his cigar in his hand, his mouth half open. The object of Dick's assault, still dazed, merely glared sullenly, his hand on his aching jaw. Behind them, the cook chuckled his delight at Della's fiery spunk.

"Come on, Dick," said Della, and together they went out. The cashier looked her astonishment, when, having donned their street clothes, they appeared at her desk and demanded their time. But Della's face did not invite questions, and none were asked.

On the street, where the throng still passed up and down, Dick turned to her. "I'm awfully sorry, Della."

Her sunny smile lighted her face. "You needn't be, Dick."

"You're going right to your room?" he questioned, as they started down the street.

"Yes." She turned into a side street, and Dick followed.

"I'll walk home with you, if you don't mind," he announced. "Gee, Della, I never meant that whack to cost you your job. But I didn't feel very gently toward that fellow, somehow, when I busted in and saw what was going on. Maybe I landed on him a little harder than I needed to, though."

"Didn't he go down with a bang!" she exclaimed, and smiled up at him.

He nodded, grinning with pleasure at her justification of him. For several moments they walked in silence. Dick broke it with a query.

"What're you going to do now, Della, if it's any of my business? You can get a job in another restaurant easy enough, I suppose."

She shrugged, staring ahead of her. "Yes, I suppose I can," she said slowly.

He glanced at her, surprised at the lackluster tone. "You don't sound very enthusiastic," he commented.

"I'm not," she acquiesced. "I hate it."

"Why, why, I thought you liked the job. You always seemed to be enjoying yourself when you were working." Dick looked his astonishment. She shook her head silently.

"I don't like it myself, a little bit," Dick admitted. "I hadn't any intention of carrying dishes for my board when I hit this

burg, either." Seeing the question in her eyes he went on.

"Guess I never told you. I came here from Glenville. Little town about sixty miles south—you don't know the place; it's not big enough to be a spot on the map, but that's our postoffice, my uncle's and mine.

"My uncle's a big farmer, grain and stock," he continued, "and his place has been home to me ever since my dad and mother died, years ago. I was fool enough to turn down his offer of a farm of my own near his place, because I had an idea I wanted to come to the city and cut a swath."

"You're like me," commented Della. "I didn't know when I was well off, either. I got this big-town bug in my bonnet three years ago, and I had to come. Nobody could tell me I was wrong, but I know it now."

"Is your home in the country, too?" asked Dick.

"No, small town," she answered. "I used to call the place Hickville. Hickville! Gee, the prize hick of the state was me when I left there.

"Not that I'm sour on the city," she went on. "It's not the big town's fault if a lot of us come piling in here, short of money, and fit for nothing but common labor. I've got no kick coming, but a ticket to that same Hickville wouldn't look like the worst thing in the world to me right now."

Dick nodded, staring thoughtfully at the pavement, and for a time they walked in silence. They had turned into a dark street, dimly lighted at long intervals by faintly glowing gas lamps on posts. The moonlight flooded everything, putting the feeble street lamps to shame, and throwing a checkered radiance through the rustling leaves of great old trees onto the illy-kept cement walk.

On either side of the street loomed rows of big wooden houses, of ancient architecture, with here and there a square of light showing through a window. Conspicuous in front of nearly every one of the houses was the printed sign, variously worded, which announced to him who had come to cast his modest lot with the city that there were furnished rooms for rent within.

The street, and those in the neighborhood, had at one time been the habitat of the first families of the city, aristocratic, aloof. Now, with those first families gone to brick and stone and stucco mansions on the hill, the chambers which had once known the leisure and refinement of wealth gave way to the clatter of the boarding house and the huddle of hall bedrooms.

At one of these houses, Della stopped, and turned to her escort. "Here's home," she said, with a despairing little grimace, "and thank you very much, Dick, for your company. And say, Dick, if you've got good sense, you'll catch the first train for that dear old Glenville. Good night—boy." She smiled, ran quickly up the short flight of wooden steps, and entered the door, through the ground glass of which the hall light flickered dimly.

Boy! A sudden fierce desire for her overwhelmed Dick. He stood a moment, irresolute, then bounded up the steps after her. Without formality he pushed open the door.

In the light of the single flickering gas jet, Della sat on the lower step of the stairs, huddled up, her head in her arms against the newel. She was crying, without sound, but with a pathetic droop of the trim figure which Dick had never seen before.

"Why, Della!" he exclaimed, and seated himself beside her. She did not look up, and his feelings conquered his timidity.

"You poor little kid," he said softly, and gently drew the drooping figure into his arms. The girl made no resistance, and he soothed her awkwardly, pressing her brown head against his shoulder.

"Don't worry, Della," he assured her, "I—I—you can get another job easy enough, can't you?"

She drew away from him, brushing at her eyes with her sleeve.

"I don't want another job," she said vehemently. "I'm sick of it, sick of it. Oh, yes, I try to make believe it's fun, and I laugh and jolly, but that big, noisy restaurant—and that smelly old kitchen—and a

lot of simps trying to kid you—and then when you're all tired out—to come to this kind of a dump—and call it home. Oh, I hate it, I hate it." She leaned her head against the post, closing her eyes wearily.

"Let's get outside in the fresh air, Della, where we can talk," Dick suggested suddenly. "You're not working to-morrow, so you can sleep as late as you like."

The girl rose silently, and they stepped out upon the porch. "Let's walk," she suggested. "It's a dandy night, and this porch is a punk place to sit."

Dick nodded with alacrity. "Sure, that's my idea too. Which way?" he queried. "You know this neighborhood better than I do."

"Any way at all," she said carelessly. "Anywhere away from that old jail of a place. This way is a nice walk."

They started off, her arm tucked lightly in his. For a time neither spoke.

"I 'spose," Della remarked finally, "some people would say it's not very proper for a young lady to be out walking with a gentleman at this time of night." Her eyes twinkled merrily at him in the moonlight, with a return of her old roguish spirits, and Dick laughed.

The street, with its great overarching trees, was very quiet, and pedestrians were few. An occasional automobile, away from the watchful eye of the traffic officers, whizzed past a cross street, with a reckless disregard of ordinances and speed limits. In some of the machines, merry parties serenaded the moon in mirthful chorus, lolling luxuriantly in roomy tonneaus. Swiftly moving taxis passed occasionally, chauffeurs grimly alert, occupants hidden in seclusion within.

The two strollers, keenly aware of the beauty of the night, said little, except for an occasional idle remark. Della had no wish to spoil the enjoyment of the occasion with a discussion of the job problem, imminent though the problem was. And Dick, with ideas and wishes of his own in the matter, found himself at a loss where to begin.

Strolling thus, they stopped finally, by mutual consent, on the big, low-arched bridge which spanned a network of railroad tracks below. Myriad bright rails gleamed up at them in the moonlight, stretching away down the deep cut, far as the eye could reach, with here and there the red and green glow of the switch lamps dotting the view.

"I know this place," said Dick. "This road," turning to look across the bridge where the tracks lost themselves in the semi-darkness of the cut, "runs to Glenville."

"Does it?" said Della, and was silent. Both stood gazing. Dick felt the light touch of her hand on his arm.

"I wonder," meditated Dick, "if I'm not a blamed fool."

"This city stuff, you mean?" asked Della.

"Yes, turning down that offer my uncle made me." Della made no comment, waiting for him to continue.

"I got a letter from my uncle yesterday," went on Dick. "He offered me a last chance to take that farm. If I don't take it right away, he's going to sell the place. He hates tenants. He tried one on that place, and chucked him. Too much snooze, too much booze, he said.

"The fellow took his stock and machinery with him when he went, of course, but his work horses were poor old spavs, anyway, and there's plenty of extra stock and machinery on the big place to stock that hundred and sixty acres. Gee, it's a fine chance to set up for myself."

"It sure is," agreed Della, her eyes gazing far away.

"But—"

"But what?"

"The lord hates a quitter." He grinned ruefully.

"Oh, you—you make me tired." Della stamped her small foot impatiently. "You were the quitter when you came here in the first place, when you didn't grab that chance on the farm. You're not quitting, you're just showing a dim streak of sense, that's all."

"Maybe," said Dick slowly. "Anyhow, I hope you're right, for I'm going to chuck the white lights, and the store clothes, and the big noise, and go back to overalls and 4:30 A. M."

"Yes, and fresh air, and sunshine, and home cooking, and sleep that wakes you up in the morning feeling as happy as the old red rooster that's crowing on the fence." She echoed his laugh, but there was a wistful note in her merriment.

Up the track a new light showed, the headlight of a coming train, flaring like a brilliant star in the cut. It was less than a quarter of a mile away when they noticed it, and the labored exhaust of the engine, slowly gaining headway with its endless line of big boxcars, came plainly to their ears.

"That's the night freight. She stops for water at Glenville," commented Dick, watching. Della was silent, and he turned to look at her. Her eyes, half shut, were fixed on the approaching light, and he caught the sparkle of tears in them. He drew a deep breath.

"Della."

"Yes."

"Della, will you—are you—going to hunt for another job to-morrow?" It wasn't at all what he had intended to say. But he waited for her answer.

"I—I suppose so," she answered listlessly. A big tear brimmed and threatened to fall. That decided it.

"Well, you're not," declared Dick, with sudden vehemence. He seized the girl's shoulders, and turned her face toward him. She blinked suddenly, and the big tear drop lost its precarious balance and fell, rolling slowly down her cheek. It lost itself, the next instant, on Dick's shoulder.

"You're going with me," said the owner of the shoulder, bending close to make his voice heard above the heavy puffing of the slowly moving train, now close upon them. "And here's our train. See those big empty cars, Della? Hurry up." He caught her arm, his eyes alight with the sudden inspiration.

"But my trunk—and everything," she protested half heartedly, but with the light of adventure kindling in her eyes, as Dick drew her, hurrying, to the end of the bridge, around it, and down the bank to the tracks.

"Darn the trunk. Sue'll pack it for you, and we'll send for it, and mine too. Look out, don't fall." He put a supporting arm around her waist, as they scrambled down the sandy slope. The engine had passed under the bridge, and the long line of cars was swaying and clanking slowly past them.

"We'll root out old Doc Weatherby for a license, and Dillman, he's the preacher, when we get to Glenville," he explained, as they crossed the intervening tracks toward the train, "and in the morning we'll go out to the farm together, and give uncle the surprise of his life. He'll be tickled foolish when he sees you."

"But, Dick, such a crazy thing to do, all of a sudden, this way."

They had reached the train now.

"Here comes our parlor car," said Dick, pointing to a big car approaching, the door of which stood invitingly open.

"Now," as the car came opposite, "up you go." She felt the tense muscles of his arms and body against her limbs as he stooped and lifted her into the doorway. He ran alongside, supporting her, until she was safely aboard, then, with a quick spring, he leaped in after her.

Seated in the car door, feet swinging, a little breathless, they looked at each other and burst into sudden laughter.

Out through the suburbs, into the quiet country, the train went, while the two sitting in the doorway of the big freight car chatted and laughed and planned, and laughed again.

The last switch light had glided past the car, the last evidence of the city they were leaving had faded in the distance, giving place to the soft green of springing fields and pastures, with here and there clustering groves in whose protecting shelter cozy farm homes slept in the moonlight.

The two fell suddenly silent, gazing into the illimitable night, with its flooding light and brooding quiet of farm and hillside. Dick's arm went around the girl's shoulders.

"What about it now, little lady, 'such a crazy thing to do, all of a sudden this way,' is it, colleen mine?"

Head thrown back, pouting red lips close to his, her eyes smiled into his face. And the long train rattled on to Glenville.

PROPRIETY AND A PULLMAN

By M. MACKENDRICK

For once the order of things is so reversed that the conscientious objector is in a position to order a stiff penalty for a minor offense.

UMBER 9, west bound from Chicago, was on the point of leaving. From far up ahead its bell clanged an impatient summons and sent metallic echoes ringing through the iron ribbed vault of the station.

At the pullman next to the observation car, the conductor gave a last warning call and swung aboard. The porter followed, and the gateman spoke sharply to a man and woman who stood talking and laughing on the wrong side of the wicket from the now moving train.

"Good Lord!" cried Maitland, and seizing his bag, he kissed his companion and dashed through the gate.

A girl who had been watching the two with some interest from the rear platform withdrew now and disappeared into the observation car.

Putting on a most undignified burst of speed, Maitland, with a final flying leap, and aided by the grinning porter, scrambled aboard. He gave a breathless laugh, readjusted his coat, accepted his hat in exchange for a fifty cent tip and strolled as nonchalantly as might be into his sleeper.

"Gosh!" he said, seating himself with a complacent sigh, "that was a close shave!" and, turning his head, looked straight into the cool blue gaze of the girl who had been watching from the platform. She made her charming eyes entirely blank, raised one eyebrow ever so slightly, and became tremendously absorbed in the view of box cars and empty tracks now flashing past her window.

Maitland stared—she was well worth a prolonged scrutiny—and then, with a formal, "I beg your pardon," and a yet more formal bow, changed his seat to the one across the aisle.

The porter came in with his bag. "This your right berth, suh?" he asked.

"Oh, yes," said Maitland, fishing for his pullman slip in his vest pocket. "This is mine all right—lower seven. Or was it eight, now?" He glanced up at the number opposite and down again to the ticket in his hand. "No number seven is the one. It says so very plainly on this nice little pink paper."

"Yes, suh," agreed the porter.

"Not much travel to-night, eh, porter?"

"No, suh, they never is this time of year. Looks like—"

"U-mm, yes." Maitland interrupted. "It seems a bit chilly in the car. Do you suppose some one could have left the back door open, by any chance? Or the front window?"

The porter, open mouthed, followed Maitland's frowning gaze to the upper windows, to the front of the car, to the rear, and at last to the lovely and haughty profile across the aisle. Slowly his face wrinkled in silent laughter. "It does act like it might come on cold. It does for a fact," he said, and departed, still chuckling his soft, almost inaudible darky chuckle.

Maitland lifted his bag to the seat and, opening it, took out the current numbers of three magazines. These he considered gravely and then extended them, one after the other, to his unsociable vis-a-vis.

"I have plenty to read, thank you," she responded to the last offering, and there was a thin edge of patient tolerance in the formal politeness of her tone. She turned a page in the book on her knee.

Maitland, still without speaking, lifted

both eyebrows with a little nod of acceptance and once more sank back in his seat. He became greatly concerned as to which of the three periodicals to read himself, but finally making his selection, he folded it with much crackling of pages, and settled down in obvious contentment.

Outside the thin gray of dusk thickened into the black of night. The porter came in and lighted up. Tickets were collected by a conductor of dignity, and reticence.

Maitland handed over his ticket without looking up. The girl in number eight had to rummage in her bag to find hers. She produced it with a low word of apology. Silence reigned again in the car.

Suddenly Maitland gave a spontaneous burst of laughter and, tossing his magazine from him, sat with folded arms smiling over what he had read.

A few sections further along two middle aged men opened up a conversational barrage preparatory to the usual sleeping car acquaintance.

"Going far?"

"Well, yes. Los Angeles. That's my home. You familiar with this line?"

"No. My first trip out this way. I get off at Kansas City."

"Say now, that's too bad! You'd ought to go on to the coast—greatest country you ever saw! I tell you it can't be beat!"

"We-ell, I'm from Io-way, myself—"

Maitland turning his head stealthily at this, caught the involuntary smile of the girl across the aisle, who had been listening too. Very faintly, but very plainly, he winked. She retreated with a frown to her book.

The diner steward came in announcing the first call for dinner, and Maitland departed at a leisurely pace in pursuit of a wash-up. When he entered the dining car some little time later, the girl was already seated at a table for two and with her back to the door. For the barest fraction of a minute he hesitated with his hand on the back of the chair opposite hers, but once more she looked through and beyond him with a brevity, and at the same time a thoroughness, which was unmistakable. And again with raised eyebrows and a slight nod Maitland accepted defeat, and passed on to take a seat facing her at the next table.

He spent the greater part of his dinner hour—when he was not actually transferring food to his mouth, and, regrettable to state, sometimes when he was—in studying the girl in front of him.

The girl, however, proved as persistent in her way as he in his. Her gaze wandered in casual interest to almost every object in the diner. It even included Maitland's hands, tie and collar, but never his eyes. She finished before he did and he gave to her victorious retreat the ungrudging tribute of an admiring smile.

He dragged through an hour in the smoker after dinner, but when one of his fellow passengers settled back with a fresh fat cigar, and an equally fresh and fat smile, and said, "Some peach in number eight, believe me!" Maitland got up abruptly and went out.

The girl was on the back platform of the observation car, alone, as he had hoped she would be.

"Personally," began Maitland with amiable candor, before she had time to move, "personally, I don't care for this traveling alone. Now you, I judge, quite enjoy it—"

The girl turned with an air of finely blended surprise and incredulity. "I beg your pardon," she said. "Were you speaking to me?"

Maitland gave a short laugh. "Oh, no," he denied brightly, "I was addressing the switchman down the track there. He's only about half a mile away and he has wonderful hearing."

In spite of herself the girl giggled, a delightful contralto giggle. Maitland took a step toward her.

But just then the brakeman swung up on to the steps and climbed over the platform gate. He deposited his lanterns and his signal flare, treated the two passengers to a brief survey, and seating himself on the stool which stood against the open door, drew out a newspaper.

"Either of you folks rather have this door closed?" he asked.

"Not I, thanks," said the girl, "I'm just going in."

Maitland did not answer at all. He ram-

med his hands in his pockets and glared scowling into the darkness behind. Several times the brakeman, as is the way with that solitary breed, rustled his paper and coughed tentatively, but Maitland paid no heed and strode by him at last with a barely to be heard "good night."

In the sleeper all but four berths, at intervals down the car, were shrouded and dark. Maitland, too restless for sleep so early, slumped boredly down in one of the empty sections and picked up the crumpled paper which lay on its seat. Finding nothing there to hold his atention he looked up with a deep yawn, to behold a vision so lovely as to make him catch his breath. He watched, his eyes half closed in the keenness of his appreciation.

The girl of lower eight, clad in a night-blue Japanese silk kimona, was coming down the narrow, swaying isle. Twinkling flame-red slippers and a glimpse of white ankles showed as she walked; her brown hair hung over her shoulders in a long braid which ended in a curl, one white hand held a small patent leather dressing case, the other daintily patted a yawn into completion. Her blue eyes gazed composedly straight ahead. In fine unselfconsciousness she passed Maitland and vanished behind the curtains of her berth.

Maitland, spurred into sudden activity, sought his own section and undressed with determined speed. He heard the porter come down the aisle, gathering up shoes, and listened until the sound of his footsteps died away in the distance. There was silence now in the car, except for the bass and nasal duet of the man from California and his friend of "Io-way." Maitland thrust forth two long, pajama clad legs and cautiously parted the curtains of the opposite berth.

"Listen, kiddie," he said softly, "be a sport, can't you?"

For answer the bell in lower eight rang sharply and long.

"For God's sake!" cried Maitland, withdrawing hurriedly, "don't do that! *Don't*, I say—"

Again the bell pealed, yet more insistently. The porter came runing, followed by the conductor. The former, only half understanding, stood goggle-eyed in the aisle and stared. His superior, stooping an official ear, nodded briefly at the low words which issued from the shrouded depths of number eight. Maitland with the covers pulled up to his neck, heard only part of one sentence, "—the insolence to pretend—"

Then things began to happen with the speed of a badly run cinematograph. The conductor jerked back his curtains and ordered him to dress and get out. To no avail did he attempt explanations—and bribery. To no avail did he protest, argue and swear. Dress he did, and out he got, and was deposited at the next stop which, inconsiderately, happened to occur almost at once.

Maitland, his bag beside him, stood on the platform of the small, deserted station and watched the green light on the rear of the train disappear into the night. He was by this time speechless, and all but thoughtless, with wrath.

Slowly he lifted one hand skyward.

"The next time I kiss another woman—even an old pal—where my wife can see me—let some one kick me—hard! Amen."

He ended the oath solemnly enough, but gradually a smile crept into his eyes and softened the angry lines around his mouth.

"Marg ought to have been an *actress*—the blamed little devil!"

ROOM TWENTY HAS A TENANT

By CARL CLAUSEN

Room twenty of the Pico House holds a place in a man's memory strong enough to draw him back after thirty-five years.

THE old Pico House or, as it is known today, The National Hotel, deceased, faces the ancient Plaza directly across the street from the church of La Reina de los Angeles.

Forty years ago, the Pico House was the foremost of its kind among the old hostelries of Los Angeles, its only rival being the Bella Union Hotel near Temple Block.

The city was just then at the beginning of a series of distressing, growing pains caused by a coterie of certain gentlemen, who had bought and otherwise acquired so much real estate in or about the city that the taxes thereon were making paupers of them.

They felt it their solemn duty to allow their brethren from beyond the Rockies to come and share the advantages of our climate—and help pay the taxes.

Result: We still have our climate. Our growing pains are worse than ever, because we grew too fast; but the Easterners drop their money in the tillers of the marble-lobbied, downtown hotels, instead of in suburban granite and adobe. North Main street is no longer the hub of commerce, and the Pico House was left high and dry—no, not dry, for a saloon in the north end of the building keeps the atmosphere sufficiently damp—when the gatherers of shekels, like birds of passage, moved south never to return.

MARK DONANT, rental agent for the Ringe Estate, rubbed his glasses and stared incredulously across the dusty, paper-littered office table at his visitor.

"Do I understand you to say that you wish to occupy room twenty of the Pico House, for one night—alone?" he rasped.

"Precisely."

The stranger shot out the word, closed his jaws with a snap and stared back at Donant without flinching. He was thin, gaunt and roughly dressed. A faded, brown corduroy suit hung loosely about his lean frame. One rough, sun-cracked hand grasped an old battered Stetson in his lap, the other was buried deep in the bulgy pocket of his coat. A pair of large, piercing black eyes regarded Donant non-committally, almost threateningly, beneath shaggy, gray eyebrows.

"Harrump-p-p," the agent rasped. "The object of this—er—unusual—"

"My business," the stranger snapped.

He stuck a long, bony finger into his vest pocket and threw a five dollar gold-piece on the table.

"If that isn't enough, I'll make it ten."

Donant picked up the coin and put it in his own pocket from sheer force of habit.

"Of course," he coughed, nervously, reaching for his receipt book.

"Never mind the receipt," said the stranger gruffly. "Give me the key and forget you saw me. I'll send it back by messenger in the morning."

Donant considered a moment as he replaced his fountain pen in his vest pocket and cleared his throat.

"What guarantee—?"

The stranger leaned back in his chair and emitted a snort.

"You city people give me a pain," he sneered. "Here I'm offering you five dollars for the privilege of occupying a room in a house that hasn't earned a nickel in rental for five years, and you act as if you thought I was trying to rob your safe.

Guarantee! If there was anything in the old shack worth stealing, the City Council would have condemned it long ago."

Donant's thin lips parted in what he, himself, thought was a smile. To anyone else it was the cold, yawning sarcophagus of mirth.

"The building has already been condemned," he said, "or, rather, all of it except the ground floor."

"Well, then, what's the objection?" The stranger glared across the table at Donant.

"That's just it," said Donant. "The City Council condemned the upper floors two years ago. If I let you in and anything happens, I'll be responsible."

"The rear entrance is on Sanchez street. Give me the key to that. I'll promise that no one will see me enter, or leave."

Donant hesitated for a moment. Then he arose, went to his desk and opened the bottom drawer.

"You seem to be familiar with the place. I thought you said you were a stranger in town," he grunted, as he fumbled among a bunch of rusty keys in the drawer.

This comment elicited no answer from his client.

A moment later, the stranger departed with the key in his pocket. Donant opened the safe and dropped the five dollar gold-piece into a drawer marked "Personal." Then he shut his desk and called up his home.

"Milly," he said, to the Lady-who-darned-his-socks, "you can go out to San Pasqual street and buy that setting of Buff Orpingtons you've been wanting."

WHEN the stranger left Donant's office he walked down Third street to Main and turned north. Stopping at a second hand store near Temple Block, he bought himself two pairs of blankets and some candles. With the blankets under his arm, he continued his way north to Arcadia street. Rounding the corner of the old Baker Block, he paused for a moment in the shadow of the overhanging wooden awning and looked around as if in doubt about the locality. Then, apparently satisfied, he muttered something under his breath and crossed Arcadia street to the intersection of Sanchez alley.

Winding his way among the ash barrels and garbage cans without looking to the right or left, he did not pause until he had traversed almost the entire length of the thoroughfare. The weather-worn, brownstone foundations of the Pico House extending in places as much as a foot over the wobbly sidewalk, told him that he had arrived at his destination.

Three rough, pine steps led from the sidewalk to an ancient panelled door with rusty hinges and a rustier padlock of brobdingnagian proportions. He placed the bundle of blankets on the out-jutting foundation and mounted the steps, fitting the key Donant had given him, into the lock. As he turned it, the padlock seemed to disintegrate at his touch and dropped into his hand in several pieces. He held the pieces up to the light and examined them.

The lock had been tampered with, recently.

There were marks upon it indicating that some blunt instrument had been used to force it open. Some one had entered by breaking the lock and had carefully fitted it together again and replaced it before leaving.

Shrugging his shoulders he picked up his blankets and put his knee against the door. It swung inward easily at his touch. Placing the broken lock in his coat pocket he shut the door behind him and mounted a dark, winding flight of stairs.

As he ascended, the sound of his footfalls echoed through the old building and returned to him from the vast, empty silences of balconied floors and cavernous rooms. To his nostrils came a faint, pungent odor, the odor of rotting wood, damp and decaying and coated with fungus. An icy draft, grave-like, and laden as with the cold mockery of unanswered prayers of departed tenants, chilled him through.

Mounting the last step, he found himself in a great vault-like corridor, where giant spider webs, the festive garlands of man's deserted haunts, decorated walls and ceiling. As if anticipating his return, fate and the passing years had hung grim

bunting in his honor. On either hand, tall, transomed doorways yawned from narrow cell-like rooms, casting eerie squares of light across the dust-coated floor. A leaky skylight had left a great discolored spot upon the rotting hall carpet.

He hesitated no longer. Down the corridor he walked, turned to the right and found the room he was looking for. The number had been torn off the door, but he knew it the moment he saw it. Turning the knob, he stepped inside and closed it.

He dropped his blankets on the floor and gazed about him. Thirty-five years ago he had occupied this very room. Down the sandy wastes of the old Santa Fe trail he had brought his wife and child, answering the lure of golden promises, extended to him by men who had since waxed rich on the savings of such as he. From the ocean to the foothills he had fought to wrest from the barren, moistureless soil the small fortune he had sunk. It was the days before irrigation, and the pitiless sun burned up his crops as fast as he had planted them.

Discouraged, penniless and broken in spirit he had returned to Los Angeles to find that his wife and young child had taken the trail to the land whence no traveler returns.

Smallpox, they told him. He was shown this room wherein they had died. In a daze he had asked for their belongings. There were none. The authorities had caused every scrap to be burned up for fear of contagion. Clothing, trinkets, everything had gone into the fire. No scrap nor shred remained to remember them by. Even a small daguerreotype of their likeness had been cast into the flames. With one blow they had been separated from him as if they had never existed, and naught but a living death remained for himself.

He gazed about the empty room and shuddered. A living death had been these thirty-five, long years, death in a thousand forms as he searched for the yellow sand along the slopes of the grim, cactus-covered foothills, death in the dry washes of streams that lay panting for moisture nine months of the year, death in the barren, heartbreaking wastes where the curse of God rested upon man and beast. And, now, at last after all these years of toil and hardship, the mountains had opened their cavern fastnesses. Into his lap they were pouring a never-ending stream of little golden grains.

Oh, the hot, hellish irony of it. The treasures of Midas could not bargain for even a tear of nepenthe.

He sank down upon the roll of blankets and buried his face in his hands. The late afternoon sun cast smoky oblongs of dirty, yellow light across the floor through windows that were sooty and dust-begrimed from season after season of neglect. An ancient clothes press, left behind by some former occupant leaned crazily against the wall, its door dangling by one solitary hinge. On a rough, dust-covered shelf lay an empty cigarette box of a brand long since gone into oblivion. A calendar with the date of many seasons past adorned the wall. It seemed to him as if here time itself had stopped with the date on the calendar and had left the room untouched and sealed through the march of years without.

When the sun sank behind the tall buildings opposite, he arose, unrolled the blankets and made ready for the night. Lighting one of the candles, he poured some hot wax on the floor, placed the candle upon it and took off his coat. Doubling it up as a pillow, he placed it under his head and laid a Colt's automatic on the floor beside the coat. Then he lay down and rolled himself into the blankets.

For a long time, he stared motionless into the spluttering candle flame. Three stories below him the city roared and clanged, but he heard it not. The footsteps of the multitude passed within a few feet of him; tired, weary footsteps dragging themselves to a couch of straw and crust of bread; light, gay, carefree footsteps, pleasure bent for the fleshpots of Egypt; but he was oblivious to them all. Without sound or movement he lay and watched the flame as the candle burned lower and lower.

It was near midnight when he moved for

the first time. The candle had burned almost to the floor. Barely half an inch remained. His long, bony fingers closed about the automatic beside his pillow. A few moments more and he'd hit the big trail after Mary and little Jim. He laughed softly and placed the weapon against his heart. The clock in the Times tower struck twelve, the candle spluttered and fell. Now—

He sat bolt upright. Throwing his covers aside, he started to his feet. He was not alone. From somewhere near him there came to his ears a curious sound, a sound as of a body dragging itself across the floor. The sound came from the hall. He could swear that he heard breathing, labored breathing as from a human being in distress. His first impulse was to investigate, but a feeling akin to terror held him rooted to the spot.

He made out the door by a faint glow of murky radiance from an arc light outside. Fascinated, he watched it. The knob turned. Gently, very gently the door moved inwards. With trembling hands he raised his pistol. Then—

In the open doorway, clearly outlined in the light from the street stood a very small child, a Mexican child.

The stranger dropped his pistol and stared unbelievingly at the apparition. At the sound, the child turned its face and held out two thin, pitiful, little hands and whimpered. A pair of dark, pleading eyes gazed full upon him from a hollow, pale, emaciated and—very dirty—face.

The stranger leaped to his feet. In a moment he found matches and another candle and was bending over his little visitor who had collapsed upon the floor.

"Almost starved to death," he muttered. "And me with millions to burn."

Lifting the boy in his arms he carried him to the light. Very tenderly he wrapped the blankets about his little guest and stood looking at him, perplexedly. Just then, the little fellow opened his eyes and smiled up at him, a wan, tired, wistful smile. One thin, frail hand reached out and tugged at his trouser leg.

Upon the floor near the child lay the automatic. Stooping, the stranger picked it up, opened it, took out the clip of shells and dropped the empty pistol in his pocket. Then, he tiptoed to the window and looked out. Below him lay the city shimmering in the glow of a million lights, the city that had broken his heart and robbed his hearth.

He bowed his head.

"Mary," he whispered, "Mary and little Jim. There's a hold-up on the trail."

FOUR days later, Donant opened his ledger, turned to page forty-seven, marked "Ringe Estate," and charged that account with a new padlock and duplicate keys.

"That's what comes of being a damn fool," he growled. Then, remembering a certain old hen who was holding down a setting of fancy Buff Orpingtons, his face relaxed.

As he closed the book and reached for his hat, the door opened. Into the office walked his visitor of four days earlier, leading a very small and very clean Mexican boy by the hand. He was a different stranger from the rough corduroyed individual Donant had quarrelled with the other day. Gray Norfolk suit, tan shoes, new, gray Stetson, gloves, white collar and a tie of exceeding festiveness. The boy wore a smart white sailor rig, white and blue half-socks, patent-leather slippers and a heavenly smile.

"I have come to return the key," said the stranger. Laboriously, he dug into his vestpocket with his gloved hand.

"Oh, rats!" he grinned. "Run your finger down my pocket and dig it out yourself."

THE FIRST INSTALLMENT

By WILLIAM DAVID BALL

Slocum's debt is one that can never be outlawed. Although he pays something on account, the balance due is more than can be estimated by a certified public accountant. It is a job for the Recording Angel.

ROTH SLOCUM, grizzle-headed freighter of supplies for the Twin Falls Land and Water Company's camp on McCullum Creek, looked up from saddling Old Baldy and scowled. Across the flat half-acre, where McCullum Creek paused for a moment before gashing its ragged canyon through the sagebrush plain, strolled Herquit, the company's chief engineer.

"Off for town, are you?" hailed Herquit, none too cordially. "Show up early Monday, Slocum. We're going to run a line for a new lateral." Herquit passed on without waiting for a reply.

Slocum grunted and wrinkled his narrow forehead. To-day was Saturday; it was the monthly pay day; and the camp was close to town—a rare combination. He had promised himself a celebration at Sego Creek that would rip the roofs off that slumberous village. What did he care for a new lateral?

He climbed slowly into the saddle and headed for Sego Creek at an easy trot. Time was when Slocum on a pay night would have taken those six miles at a sweeping gallop, larruping his horse at every jump and emitting yells that pained the ears of Cassia County's coyotes.

But sixty years of use, and abuse, had shrivelled the body of him. The spirit was willing enough. The mean, passionate nature burned as ardently as ever from his round little eyes; it showed arrogantly in the angle of his lean jaw and the set of his ill-kempt head. Slocum was known, and feared, as the meanest man in Cassia. A small man, a bad man, and withal no weakling. One virtue only had ever shown itself from the depths of his blasphemous soul. In a queer, twisted way he was "square." The one boast always on his tongue was that he paid his debts. Where a money obligation was definitely involved, a partner in trouble, a wrong to be avenged—in short, in a pinch, you could count on him. Beyond that he was a human weasel.

He passed Lava Bend, a semi-circle of gaunt pillars, and turned to the hills. He would go to the cabin and shave. He was now on his own land, a section of unfenced brush owned by himself and his partner. A light burned in the cabin. He wondered idly what had brought Harv Ellis home so early from the lower camp.

He threw off Old Baldy's bridle, cursed him to the stable with a hard slap on the haunches, and entered the cabin.

A tall, stoop-shouldered man sat at the dirty kitchen table playing solitaire between two piles of unwashed dishes. He gave no sign of noticing Slocum's entrance. He handled the cards with slow, dogged touch, his whole body rigid.

"Hello," rasped Slocum. "Early, ain't you, Harv?"

Harv Ellis laid down his cards and raised a pair of lusterless, troubled eyes. His face had none of the snake-like virility that stamped the face of Roth Slocum. The features dissolved into each other like a wash of wasted paints. The color of his eyes was that of his cheeks, the dirty tan of an old glove. His voice came peevish and flat.

"I saw Tim Aikens this morning, Roth."

"Yeh?"

"He just got back from Boise. He saw my sister—my stepsister. I told you I ain't heard from her in twenty year. Her

scoundrel of a husband deserted her way back—"

"Yeh, I know," cut in Slocum indifferently, as he scrubbed himself at the wash basin.

"I wish I could get hold of him," continued Ellis querulously. "I'd take it out of his hide, I bet. But I couldn't make him pay it all. I'd like to torture him, little at a time, and make—"

"Sure," interrupted Slocum with a loud, coarse laugh. "Make him pay in installments, like. Say, I'm goin' out to-night."

"Tim ran across her in Boise," repeated Ellis. "She's sick. Her eyes is going blind. Tim told her where I was. Tim says she's got to be taken East, to a specialist. The doctor in Boise says it will cost seven hundred dollars for an operation. I got to raise a thousand."

Slocum stopped stropping. "Where you goin' to raise it?"

"I—I thought we might borry on the land."

"Borry! Sell you mean!"

"Why, Roth," whined the other. "We'd be fools to sell now."

"Why, Roth!" mimicked Slocum. "You old granny, you. Ain't we been aimin' to sell for two months back? What's got into you?"

"But some says the company's gonna—"

"Look here." Slocum pounded the table. "We both got to have money. I want to buy that string of horses from old Higgins before somebody else gets them. We've got to sell and we're a-goin' to sell the first chance we get."

Bristling with temper, Slocum grabbed the lamp and carried it to the shelf beside the cracked looking glass. Ellis went on with his incessant flow of rambling talk.

Slocum, in irritable silence, shaved and carried the lamp back to the table.

"You see," Ellis was saying, "this man deserted her twenty—"

"Yeh, I know. I'm goin'. So long."

"Oh, Roth!" A note of petulance crept into Ellis's voice. Slocum stopped with his hand on the knob.

"You got your pay," complained Ellis, "and it's Saturday. Remember what the doctor told you the last time you was sick. He said if you took too much whiskey again—"

"Doctors," snapped Slocum, slamming the door behind him, "doctors are jackasses."

In the saloon of Peter Simpson, Slocum leaned back against the bar and tilted his shapeless hat to the back of his head. Close to his elbow stood a tall, brown bottle and two little glasses. His lean jaw stuck out at an insolent angle; his small, black eyes darted about the room, noting joyously how men went a long way around to avoid him.

Through the swinging doors came the portly figure of lawyer Eli Bennett—"Crooked Eli" he was called by the common herd—well-dressed, well-mannered, well-loved by the church members of Sego Creek. Slocum's little eyes lighted with unholy glee. Crooked Eli did not pay his debts. He, Roth Slocum, did. He seized the quart bottle from the bar and advanced. As an act of justice, he would upend this bottle between Eli's white collar and his fat, flabby neck.

Eli Bennett paused beside a table. Across twelve feet of space he was calling to the bartender, his reputed partner in many a shady deal. "What do you know, Ike? Old Higgins wants me to take that string of horses to pay off his mortgage. Maybe I'll do it."

Slocum, a few feet away, stopped abruptly. His half-befuddled brain worked slowly. Crooked Eli going to get those horses? Not much. Crooked Eli's business wasn't horses; it was mortgages and land. Land? Slocum grinned. That was a good idea. Two birds—one stone.

He thrust the bottle, not down Eli's flabby neck, but into Eli's well-padded ribs. "I want to speak to you on—on 'portant matter of business," he announced with exaggerated gravity.

Bennett frowned but followed. He knew that land of the two partners, knew the old man wanted to sell.

Slocum led his unsteady way to a table in the corner. "I got papers for my land," he bragged. "Patent from the Gover'ment. In my name, too."

Eli's round chin nestled still farther

into the folds of his fat neck. "Harv Ellis owns half of it, of course?"

"Sure. Always square with a partner. Only my name on papers, though."

"But you mustn't sell now," came the smooth tones of Eli. "Why not borrow a little on it? Some day it will be worth—"

"It won't," shouted Slocum. "It's nothing but brush. No improvements, no nothing. Orneriest piece of ground—"

"But the company—"

"Company nothing. You're just like Harv Ellis—no brains. I tell you I want to sell—sell for two thousand."

"I'll take it for fifteen hundred."

Eli's words came with clipped emphasis. From his bulky wallet he sorted out a paper, wrote rapidly for a moment, and pushed pen and paper across to Slocum.

"Option on the section for ten days," purred Eli. "Here's twenty. I'll have the rest of the fifteen hundred at Buck's store Monday right after dinner."

Slocum pocketed the gold piece with a leering smile, and painfully scrawled his name to the paper.

A half-hour after Eli Bennett had gone, Harv Ellis entered the saloon, and slouched up to the bar, where Slocum was arguing loudly with Ike.

"I saw Crooked Eli, Roth," whined Ellis. "He says you sold him our section."

"That's righty."

Ellis dabbled in a little pool of spilled beer on the bar, drawing wet lines on the polished walnut with the long second finger of his hand. "You oughtn't to've done it, Roth."

"Forget it," growled Slocum. "You wanted a thousand. I got it. You got no kick coming when I keep five hundred and you get a thousand."

"Aw—aw—" Little whimpering sounds came from Ellis's throat. "You hadn't ought to've done it, Roth. You'd ought to've seen me about it. 'Tain't fair."

"Look here." flared Slocum. "Did you come in here to preach to me? Thousand was what you wanted. You won't get it now, see. We'll split even—*even*, see. Serves you right for tryin' to preach. Get out."

"Aw, I didn't mean—" A bottle hurtled through the air, and Ellis dodged out the door.

In the early hours of the morning, Old Baldy, his master an inert mass in the saddle, walked down Sego Creek's one street, and picked his way sedately through the sagebrush toward the foothills and home. At the cabin door he stopped and waited patiently until Slocum rolled from the saddle and crawled inside.

Slocum awoke fully dressed, lying crosswise on the bunk. The sun was high—about noon, he reflected. His legs felt numb, probably from hanging on the edge of the bunk. They were so numb he could not move them. Using his arms he struggled to a sitting position. He waited several moments, trying to collect his scattered wits. He pinched the flesh, first above the knees and then below. There was no feeling whatever. Another moment he waited. He tried to move his legs. They were useless—two pieces of dead wood.

Roth Slocum laughed—a quiet, unpleasant laugh. "You win, Doc," he said aloud, and swore.

His next movements were unhurried and well-considered.

He rolled to the floor and, with his wiry arms, dragged himself across the room to his old cowhide trunk. On the way he stopped at the water bucket and took a drink.

At the trunk, he got one of his revolvers, stuck it into his waistband, and crawled out to the east side of the house. He managed to climb to a pile of old sacks, where he lay panting. The afternoon wore on. Occasionally he broke out cursing—methodically and without passion.

At two o'clock, when the Peters family, on its way to church, passed on the section line a half-mile away, he attracted attention by six shots in such rapid succession that the reports blended.

The Peters boy, tow-headed, sweating in his Sunday clothes, came up the trail and approached Slocum fearfully.

"Find Doc Summers, you kid," yelled Slocum. "Find him pronto. Something the matter with my legs. Go on—run, you little runt." He waved his gun.

The boy, thoroughly frightened, sped back. The Peters surrey disappeared in a cloud of dust.

It was four o'clock when Doc Summers arrived. With him came four of Sego Creek's leading citizens. They carried Slocum back to his bunk, where Summers made a brief examination.

"Paralysis," stated Summers tersely, "just as I promised. Can't do anything for you, Slocum."

"Thought so," growled Slocum. "Lots of good it did to send for you."

Thomas Randall, the banker, drew the other leading citizens to a corner, where they held a whispered consultation. The faces of all four expressed a smug satisfaction as they returned to the middle of the room. Thomas Randall fidgeted forward, his bony lower jaw working nervously on a wad of gum.

"Elijah Bennett," he began, "told me this morning he'd have the money ready to-morrow and that he'd want immediate possession of this place."

"He can have it," growled Slocum, who lay on his back staring at the ceiling.

Randall cleared his throat. "God in his mercy has sent this visitation upon you, and we—eh—we want to do our duty by you, Slocum."

Slocum grunted his contempt.

"Monday," continued Randall with increasing nervousness, "when Pete drives the stage through, you be ready."

"What for?"

"We've decided to send you to Pocatello—to the poor farm."

"The hell you have." Despite his weakness, Slocum struggled up to a sitting position. His black eyes blazed. "You—." He ripped out a string of oaths that sent Randall back with blanched face.

Slocum controlled himself. "Who do you think you are—cheating Tom Randall? Got it all fixed, have you? Well, get this into your heads, you coyote-faced prayer-mongers. When you take me to a poor farm I'll be dead *all* the way up. Doc—" He turned to Summers who stood to one side with his hand over his mouth. "Doc, you stop on your way back and tell old lady Morrowbee to come up here. She cooked and tended for me once before when I—"

The door opened suddenly and Harv Ellis stamped into the room. His lips pressed upon each other in a thin, crooked line, his hat was pulled down straight and hard over his forehead, and his eyes had lost their ineffectual stare. Roth Slocum grinned. Something, somehow, had roused Harv Ellis to anger.

Ellis stopped within three feet of the bunk and planted himself firmly. "Roth, I been to the Upper Camp! I saw Herquit, and I learned things. They're goin' to run a line for a new lateral Monday, and that new lateral goes above our section! The land you sold for fifteen hundred is worth thirty-two thousand. Ain't that right?" He turned fiercely to Thomas Randall.

Randall nodded energetically. "If the lateral's going in, your land's easy worth fifty an acre clear."

Roth Slocum gave a resigned shrug. "Hard luck, Harv. Old Eli's got the option—same as a deed—hard luck. But be a sport."

Ellis whirled savagely. "Luck. That wasn't no hard luck. Wasn't you working with Herquit right along? You crook."

Slocum's face went white. He gasped.

Ellis went on, his voice rising to a thin screech. "You fixed up a deal with that skunk of a Crooked Eli—fixed it up to do me out of my share. You double-crossed a partner—"

"You're a liar."

Ellis stepped back and waved an inviting hand. "Get up and say that. What's the matter with you—scared? Why're you sitting there? Get up and say that."

Slocum's eyes were scalding with tears of impotent rage. His mouth moved soundlessly.

For the first time Ellis seemed to notice something wrong. He looked at Doc Summers, and sudden comprehension broke over him. His weak wrath died. He took a step toward the bunk and half-lifted his hand in a gesture of sympathy. Slocum's small, blazing eyes rebuffed him.

"Oh, all right then," he muttered. "I warned you about the drink. I'll get off

from work to-morrow and we'll split the fifteen hundred at Buck's and settle up."

Slocum found his voice. "You're right we'll settle up," he yelled. "Double-crossed you, have I? No man ever said that to me and got away with it. I pay my debts, and I'll pay you."

Ellis departed, followed by cursing.

Far into the night Slocum's head tossed feverishly on the sack of straw that served as a pillow. Never in his sixty years had he swallowed such an insult. It was a lie. He hadn't known where the lateral was going. But nobody would believe that. They all hated him. But he was square. And Harv Ellis.... Slocum felt for his empty gun, lying somewhere on the bunk, and shook his head. There was a better way.

This sister of Harv's was sick. She was going blind in the eyes. Ever since he had known Harv, Harv had spoken of this sister with tears. He had never mentioned her name—just cried about his sister, his stepsister. Harv would use his seven hundred and fifty dollars to help her. Now, weak Harv Ellis went crazy when he saw a pack of cards. Just riffle a deck under his nose and say the word, and no matter what he was doing he'd stop it to play; cards took all the backbone out of him. Yet he was a mutt at cards, too. When they split the money to-morrow it would be easy. He, Roth Slocum, had once been a gilt-edged card man.

Slocum fell asleep with a twisted smile on his thin, mobile lips.

Monday morning, Buck Murray, in the little back room of his hardware store, leaned idly against the table. "Roth," he said, "Randall told me Pete's going to stop the stage here when he goes through to-day. I can't see why you got to go to a poor farm with seven hundred and fifty dollars coming."

Roth Slocum's eyes narrowed with crafty glee. "Me in a poor farm?" he chuckled. "Not much. I got seven-forty coming; and maybe that ain't all. Harv—Harv's got another like it." He slipped a deck of cards from his pocket.

Buck's mouth sagged. He spat disgustedly at the coal bucket and walked to the door. "You're sure living up to your reputation, Slocum."

At twelve-thirty Eli Bennett and Harv Ellis arrived with a notary public. The papers were quickly made out. Bennett pushed two canvas sacks, each containing $740 in gold, to the middle of the table, gathered up his papers, and departed.

Harv Ellis stood before the table, his hands pressing heavily upon its edge. Something cold and hard shone from his neutral-colored eyes. About the mouth new lines had come—lines almost suggestive of strength.

"I got a letter from my sister—my stepsister—Roth Slocum," he said in even tones. "You never told me *you* been married."

Slocum's little eyes narrowed. Of its own volition his right hand moved imperceptibly toward the table-edge.

"And you never told me," Ellis grated on, "that you left your wife and her little girl baby winter 'o '97, in the camp of Ely, Nevada."

Slocum's right hand flashed to his hip—the old, almost instinctive movement of the days gone by. The hand came back empty, trembling.

Harv Ellis nodded. "Yes, we'd settle it that way if you wasn't a cripple. I got a letter. It's long. The baby died that winter. She says it was better that way. That was a bad winter, specially for a woman. She don't say how she made a living after that—that is, she don't come right out and say.... I guess it was the only way she could."

A moment of silence followed. Roth Slocum sat motionless, breathing heavily.

Ellis went on in low tones. "Ever since I known you, you low snake, you bragged about paying your debts. Here's one you missed. It's run twenty year. You'd make that scoundrel husband pay in installments like, would you? Well, tell me, Roth Slocum, what've you ever paid on this debt."

Slocum's eyes suddenly distended. A vein bulged out, throbbing, on his forehead. His limbs twitched as he slumped lower in his chair.

Ellis straightened up to his full height,

picked up one of the canvas bags, and turned.

"Wait." In Slocum's voice was a vibrant note of fear. His unsteady fingers fumbled with the deck of cards. He began riffling the pack feverishly.

Ellis's eyes fell to the cards and lingered. The lines about his mouth that had almost suggested strength quivered, shifted, and turned to senile wrinkles. An avid gleam replaced the cold directness of his look.

Roth Slocum spoke. "I'll cut you, Harv, for the fifteen hundred. High man wins."

Ellis closed his eyes. A convulsive shudder drew his stooped shoulders down still farther. He folded his arms, gripping each one with a claw-like hand. "I might double it for her," he muttered hoarsely.

"If I lose I go to the poor house," jeered Slocum.

Ellis's voice came scarcely above a whisper. "She don't come right out and say—" He lifted his head and looked squarely into his enemy's eyes. "I sha'n't risk it."

"Afraid?" All the venom in Roth Slocum's nature went into that one word.

Ellis recoiled. "Roth Slocum, I'll take you. Cut."

Slocum's breath came pantingly. Drops of sweat jumped out upon his pale forehead. Three times his hand tried to reach the cards before it succeeded.

He lifted half the deck, glanced carelessly at the bottom card, and placed his cut on the table, face down.

Harv Ellis slowly turned over the top card from the remainder of the deck. It was the ten of clubs.

"You win," said Slocum in a voice hardly audible. "You win with a ten-spot."

"With a ten-spot," repeated Ellis coolly. He swept up the two canvas bags in his hands and walked to the door.

Buck Murray sprang down from the counter with an oath. "Hey, Ellis," he bellowed. "That's a fine way to treat a partner. Don't you know—"

Roth Slocum lifted a steady hand that checked Buck's words. Slocum's ill-kempt head came up with a little movement of pride.

Ellis reached the street. Through the open door came the clatter of the stage.

"Give Old Baldy to Mrs. Morrowbee," said Roth Slocum. "I owe her a few dollars. And tell—tell—Pete to wait."

"He's waitin' now," said Buck. He lifted Slocum hurriedly in his arms. From Slocum's limp left hand the cards he had cut from the deck slipped to the floor. The bottom card flipped out and lay face up.

Two minutes later, the stage rattled away.

Buck Murray, returning, stopped suddenly as he caught sight of the upturned card on the floor.

"Hell!" he whispered. "Since when did a king lose to a ten-spot?"

THE RURAL DISTRICTS

By MICHAEL WHITE

THIS story must be told in George Charles Fenton-Bolitho's own words, because otherwise justice cannot be done to him. At all times the hyphen between Fenton and Bolitho must be remembered, for the reason that it is important he should not be confused with other Bolithos who dwell in sundry parts of England. Fenton-Bolitho hailed from Tipton Grange within what might now be appropriately termed a manfly from London, and was encountered on a steamer with her bow turned toward Europe and the shore of the United States fading in the distance. He was what the reporters would call typically English, wore a check tweed suit, and a manner of injury sustained that was beautiful in its innocence.

"I have reason to agree with you," said Fenton-Bolitho, "that the United States is an extraordinarily large country. In that respect I have had a really remarkable experience. Quite astonishing when you come to think of it! My doctor, you know, considered that my health would be benefited by an ocean voyage, so I thought I would visit our cousins across the Atlantic. Please do not misunderstand me for a moment that I was otherwise than most gratified with the conditions I found prevailing in your country; but—ah—I feel

sure you will agree with me when I say I encountered an annoying experience.

"I had spent a few days very enjoyably in New York, when it occured to me that my friends at the club would naturally wish to know my impressions of the rural districts, the—er—the condition of your agricultural population, which is such a matter of grave concern to us in the British Isles. So with that object I made inquiries and was recommended to one of those people you call a ticket agent. I found him a very agreeable young man, willing to do almost anything to oblige me. I explained to him my desire to see a little of the country, particularly what we understood as the rural districts—our midland and southern counties, you know. But when he asked where precisely I wished to go, I naturally replied that I must leave that to his discretion, being a stranger merely wishing to see something of the rural districts.

"He then suggested a trip to San Diego. As I had never even heard of the place, I remarked that, provided it was a pleasant and salubrious spot, I was prepared to follow his advice in going to San Diego. He was really so attentive in pointing out the advantages of booking immediately, that I promised to recommend him to any members of my club who should contemplate visiting your country. I fear I formed a too hasty judgment of that young man's ability. I regret to say I shall not recommend him to any of my friends after my experience.

"The young man charged me what I thought at the time was a rather large sum to see something of the rural districts, but one must be prepared for such things in visiting strange and distant countries. He also gave me a most remarkably long ticket, and told me I was to start that evening on a train he called the Limited. As a significant illustration of the young man's singular lack of fitness for his position, he was utterly unable to explain why the train was called the Limited. Really, he seemed to regard my insistence on this point as a piece of humorous pleasantry, I assure you, quite out of place.

"But I, of course, took the Limited, and upon my word there was apparently very little limitation to the distance it traveled. I was astonished—I may say almost dumfounded—when I discovered I was actually to travel for five days through the rural districts. I give you my word I had never contemplated such a journey. Five days, you know, going through the rural districts! Of course I would never have undertaken it had I been aware of the extraordinary distance to San Diego.

"But the point is, I cannot understand why the young man—the ticket agent—should have been so remarkably stupid as to advise me to go to San Diego. When I reached that place I found it is not in the rural districts at all. As you may be aware, San Diego is a seaport on the Pacific. I found myself, therefore, looking at the water—the ocean—which I think any intelligent ticket agent should have known was not my objective, because I had seen quite enough of the—ah—water coming over, don't you know?

"I was positively indignant and at once retraced my steps to New York for an explanation of the ticket agent's conduct. But you will hardly believe me when I say, that when I complained to the ticket agent that I had found San Diego not in the rural districts, his answer was, that he naturally supposed I would have seen enough of the darned things—I believe that was his curious expression—on the trip across the continent. I immediately lodged a complaint with his superior officer, and I shall write about it to the Times directly I reach England. I trust your papers will take the matter up, and that public opinion will compel the—er—ticket agents not to sell passages in such extraordinary fashion."

"But don't you think," asked the stranger on shipboard, sympathetically, but with a hand on his chin, "that the ticket agent may have had a personal motive in sending you across the continent to San Diego?"

"How could he?" retorted Fenton-Bolitho. "He simply didn't know that San Diego was not, properly speaking, in the rural districts. He sent me there, I presume, trusting to chance that it might be so. But my word! I think I made the fact plain to him."

THE UNBIDDEN GUEST

The longer a man lives the more convinced he becomes that the essential thing is not what a man says or does, but how he says it or does it. Men like Lincoln, Walt Whitman or Ralph Waldo Emerson may prove the rule by being the exceptions, but on the other hand we have innumerable others like Shaw, Wilde, Kipling, Rabelais and Arthur Brisbane who keep the theory within the realm of pragmatic truth.

Now there is nothing in this story which would open up vast avenues of thought nor stir one to his philosophical depths, nor bring him back to the path of virtue, but there is a pleasant feeling steals o'er one on reading it which comes with knowledge that the author really understood the materials and subject matter he used. It is just possible of course that Mr. Clausen has never smelled the sea nor heard the staysails pounding in the wind nor pictured the phosporescent turbulence of the bar as he describes it so deftly in his story. If he has not, all the more credit to him, and I tremble to think what he might accomplish if he actually experienced these things.

When one has not the endowments of a Balzac or Zola, that is to say, when one has not the infinite patience and exactitude of these artists, then a good imagination is a very fine substitute. I should like to pay the author the compliment of saying that certain of his descriptive passages recall vividly to my mind one of Pierre Loti's works, "An Iceland Fisherman," which I consider to be a gem for word painting.

There are many colorful passages which betoken many things and for the edification of the amateur like myself I take pleasure in reviewing them. For instance, the following:

"Across the phosporescent turbulence of the bar, the returning fleet came tumbling, decks awash, and slack sheets swinging to leeward, a mongrel assembly of craft—brigantine, lugger, fore-and-after, tops'l schooner, Latin-rigged banco, with their motley crews singing chanteys in twenty dialects. Blocks and tackle whined, halyards roared, staysails pounded in the wind and two score craft went over stays at ten fathoms of anchor-chain amid hoarse shouts and commands."

Or again:

"At the edge of the world, the day flung its last crimson garment into the stygian pool and night brooded over the sea and the slack tide moaned ominously among the reefs. On the silent sea and the empty earth nothing stirred."

Therein are suggestions of Joseph Conrad, Jack London or even Lord Dunsany. And for a touch of exoticism and a dash of bizarre, reflect on this line: "Aileta searched the ghoulish faces in the churning miasma of betel, bhang and stale beer."

A Burton Holmes Travelogue may be scientific, entertaining and photographic, but a vivid canvas done by an artist is ever so much more interesting and stimulating.

—Henry V. Miller.

THE DOGS OF DEATH

THE DOGS OF DEATH is a successful title for Chart Pitt's intensely interesting story. It vividly forecasts the gruesome adventure that follows; it rightly names the most interesting and peculiar feature of the tale; and it, perhaps unconsciously, reveals a salient characteristic of the author's style—his fondness for alliterative combinations. Note Burntwater Bill, mad midgets, lost land, gray gloom, frozen fens and others. This recurrent alliteration, though undeniably a mannerism, is not unattractive; it seems rather an essential part of the extremely poetic diction of his descriptions.... The Dogs of Death succeeds chiefly as a story of setting and atmosphere. The characters move against a clearly visualized background which dominates them. Sod huts, tundra marshes, peat fires and moss wine seem as real after reading as actual experience; while the bleak hopelessness of the fur coast, the lure of the hazy hinterland beyond the barrier hills, and finally the absolute relentlessness of the polar wilderness form a keenly felt atmosphere. Though it is remarkable that Burntwater found Rusty Nolan so easily, considering the long journey across a flat, unknown land, traced only by shifting wolf trails, everything else, even the strange taboo and totemism of the mad dwarfs, is convincing. But in spite of plausibility and vividness, and partly because of them, the story lingers in the mind more like a well remembered dream than a story read, and this dream-like unreality is its greatest charm.

—Velma Van Nest Walder.

There is a word much in evidence in all of his stories for which the writer seems to have an affinity, and that is "lean." It is a peculiar word, significant and descriptive, and because of that should be sparingly used. Nine times it appears in this one short-story; in fact, it becomes a theme which irritates.—*Bessie Loesges.*

It is probable that for the purpose of describing a condition of combined spareness and strength the word "lean" is to be preferred to all others, hence its use in

describing Burntwater Bill's body, fingers and arms, also his trained malamutes; but when to the list is added lean hills, years, miles and a lean wilderness, the repetition becomes tiresome.—*Leora Tuttle.*

OUT OF THE BURROW

OUT OF THE BURROW is weak in plot, poor in the element of suspense and portrayal of its characters, with an ending so abrupt and unsatisfactory that the reader doubts if it was given a thought until the story was about to be concluded.

The authoress has tried to portray Henry as a very unassuming, retiring man of quiet and kindly nature. While this description of his character is fairly convincing and true to type, the impression one gets from the following queer description of his physical qualities is not: "This characteristic of quietness seemed accentuated by curious mole-colored hair of almost furry texture, by shadowy gray eyes, and a skin resembling that of a baby elephant in shade." From the above exaggerated description one gets the impression that the young man is a cross between a mole and a baby elephant, instead of just a queer, drab looking, very much misunderstood human being.

It would be more true to life for Jane's sympathy and understanding to change Henry and make him less gloomy as is usually the case with a man of this type when he finally meets a person who loves or understands him. That the girl is in love with him is the most surprising thing, for certainly the other young man who pays her constant attention and for whom she seems to care more than she should (considering her affection for Henry) is more desirable than he.

Another weak point is Jane's utter disregard for Henry's safety when a search is being conducted for him after the building collapses. It would be more human for her to be assisting in the search instead of calmly walking back and forth on the opposite side of the street in company with "the other man." Her grief upon seeing him seems feigned and lacks the genuine heartache a girl of Jane's tender sympathy and understanding would naturally feel.—*Ruth Keenan.*

...The author, after having somewhat successfully presented the picture of a most uncanny individual, and informed us that he is instinctively avoided, which we can readily believe, introduces the all-too-beautiful Jane, who falls in love with this staring nonentity for no earthly reason whatever. Her case defies diagnosis, for if, under this obnoxious camouflage there lies a wholesome human spirit, neither she nor the reader is given evidence of it....

Jane is rash in attaching importance to the conduct of the canary. If his bird in a normal, placid mood had trustfully flown to the hand of the man from whom children were wont to run screaming, we might believe that its judgment was based on the evidence of a deeper insight, but the bird has found Henry's hand in the darkness and while suffering from panic. Given time to recover from shock, and discover its whereabouts, it, too, might flee in horror.

The intimation that Henry has acquired, through the accident, the power of expressing his thoughts audibly is not impressive, since we are given no hint of what these thoughts have been. Mere volubility would enhance little this gray spectre.—*Leora Tuttle.*

ECLAIRS AND GINGER SNAPS

The union between dainty Daphne, with her striving toward the unusual and beautiful as she understands it, and Horace, brought up in an environment of serviceable patched ginghams with portraits of Butts forbears in lieu of decorative art, is quite consistent, for the attraction of opposites is generally conceded.

Of course when Daphne lets her tastes and convictions run riot so that the health and comfort of Horace are endangered, he naturally reacts to Miss Pell, who stands ready to offer him the fundamentals which are necessary to his well being. This is simply a case of "any port in a storm" but it serves to teach Daphne the importance of the essentials of living.

Miss Pell fails at any stage to appear convincing as a third point of a triangle, so it is a clever stroke which endows her with common sense and kindliness converting her from an unalluring vampire to a likeable human being.

Daphne however, was not all wrong in attempting to introduce "flossy knick knacks" into her scheme of life. We would hate to think that she changed so radically as to become a second Auntie Miller, worthy and well meaning as the latter is, for it cannot be forgotten that Horace did not choose one of this type for a life partner although special reference is made to their plentitude in his home town. An over supply of eclairs may cloy, but there is something maddening to the finer sensibilities in an unrelieved diet of ginger snaps.—*Louise Detlefs.*

INSIDE THE MUFF

INSIDE THE MUFF is a story of the steel shops of Pittsburgh. As I live in this city and have had experience in these shops, I can vouch for the truth of most of the

incidents and situations involved in this story. As to the men described, they can all be found in any shop here. Those who are familiar with shop papers know that such rapid fire engagements as described in this story often result from such casual and unconventional meetings as that between Grayland and Dorothy Bascomb.

—*Maurice Baum.*

In attempting to express the hero's decision of character, instead of saying: "Tiny lines of determination and dogged persistence already showed at the corners of that big mouth," lines which are not wholly conclusive, as the constant pipe smoker has them, it would have been closer to the physiological truth to have said, as Darwin puts it: "The habitual and firm closure of the mouth would thus come to show decision of character; and decision readily passes into obstinacy, or dogged persistence."—*Pendleton P. Karr.*

KELLEN AND MISS VAN WICK

This story seems to be merely an incomplete component of a real story. It seems to be an imaginative incident rather than an example of that form of literature commonly known as the short story. From the composition it would seem that the great truth—"A man taking too much interest in too many women will always encounter trouble"—has sprung up in the mind of the author. Either the author is an amateur, ignorant of the technique and the fine points of short story writing, or else he has been too negligent to work the story out in his mind before expressing himself on paper. The latter condition seems to be the more probable, for the finely wrought descriptions of nature and human nature to be found in this same story are not from the hand of an amateur.—*Leslie E. Dunkin.*

Note: It is not necessary to criticise every story in this number; nor are you limited to one. Each criticism should be as nearly as possible in the form of a finished essay. It may be breezy and whimsical, or a severely plain exposition; but it should be more than a synopsis, and it must not exceed five hundred words. Criticisms should be mailed to the BLACK CAT not later than the tenth of the month following the month of issue; i. e., criticisms of this number (May) should be mailed not later than June 10. *The best criticisms will be paid for at the rate of one cent per word* and will be published, with the names of the authors, in the third issue following, which in this case will be the August number. In preparing criticisms, write on one side of the paper only. The name and address should be written at the top of the first sheet of each criticism, and the number of words in each criticism should also be written at the top of the first sheet.

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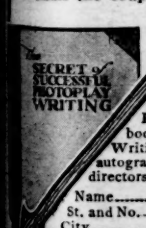

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